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By Faith Baldwin

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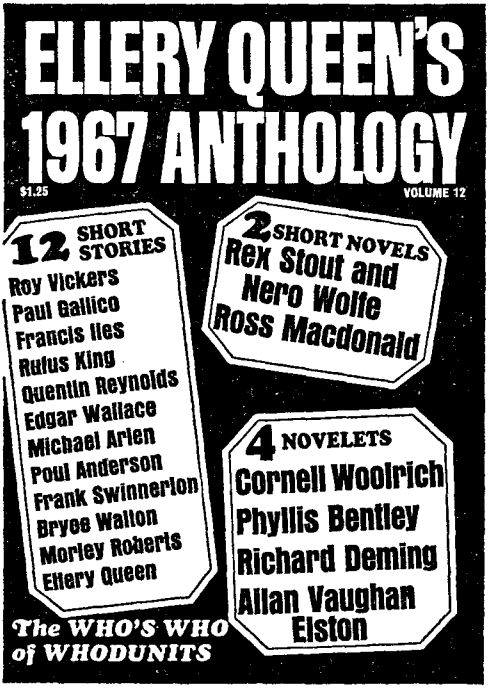

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An interesting and timely story about a part of the world that erupts in the headlines nearly every day, and about an American Consulate employee who somehow communicates the sadness and futility of that unhappy part of the world . . .

DEATH IN SAIGON

by WALTER J. WINN

HAROLD PITT LOOKED OUT AT Hong Kong harbor and watched a ferry make tight circles in the distance. The water shimmered in the morning sun and he wished he was on the ferry, or across in Kowloon, or any place but his office in the American Consulate. Mrs. Martin was due in ten minutes and he did not want to see her.

The circling ferry, probably looking for a Chinese suicide, was like Pitt's own thoughts. His mind whirled as he sought a decent way to avoid his visitor. The ferry stopped turning and slowly moved on toward Kowloon.

Visa applications, passport renewals, and travel regulations filled Harold Pitt's working day and he was neither inclined nor equipped to deal with a stranded American woman whose husband had just died in Vietnam. But the choice was not his. He had the assignment because no one else in the consulate wanted to talk to her and because he was too timid and too junior an employee to refuse.

He often envied others in the consulate who had jobs more glamorous than his, those who did more than pass papers to each other. He envied the ones who went to diplomatic functions, who met British officials on business, even those who dealt routinely with the public at the consulate. But he did not look forward to Mrs. Martin.

"Morning, Pitt." Malcolm Bates of the consular security staff grinned down at him and dropped an envelope on his desk. "There's her passport."

"Thanks," said Pitt tonelessly. He opened the envelope, took out Mrs. Martin's passport, and looked at Bates. "Have you any suggestions on what I should say to the woman? I've never done this sort of thing before, you know."

"Nothing to it, Pitt. Just be sympathetic and ask if she can tell us any more about her husband's death."

"I don't imagine," Pitt said quietly, "that her husband's death is her favorite subject."

"Relax." The other man was still grinning. "She came in herself yesterday to tell us about it and I asked

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her every question in the book. It's good interrogation policy and kept her from freezing up. She'd been in Hong Kong a week waiting for her husband to come up from Saigon on leave. She'd heard nothing, so she wired him two days ago and learned that he'd just died."

"My God. It must have been a shock."

"Sure, but she took it quite well. I cabled our Embassy in Saigon and they confirmed it. Then she told me her passport was here at the consulate and she needed it, because she was going straight back to the States. By the time I found it, another cable was in from Saigon with questions for her. She was here most of the day. In the end she must have been a little rattled because she left her passport behind on my desk. I didn't notice it until after she'd gone."

"How did we get her passport in the first place?" asked Pitt, alert to any trespassing on his tiny sphere of influence.

"Simple. She turned it in last week for renewal, and yesterday it was still downstairs in your mill. I had it sent up."

Pitt was annoyed. "Then it didn't get renewed."

The security officer shrugged. "So what? It's good for a few more months without renewal, and she's going straight home."

Pitt opened the passport to Page 2. It was still valid for nearly two years, not a few months. But an active man like Bates might miss small details.

As Pitt turned the pages her photograph caught his eye. She was a handsome woman with dark hair, high cheekbones, and intelligent eyes. The nose was straight and well formed, and the lips held the hint of a smile.

He looked at the preceding pages.

Name: Pamela Scott Martin. Place of birth: Manchester, England. Date of birth: November 20, 1928. Occupation: Housewife.

He glanced higher on Page 3. Height: 5 feet 10 inches. Hair: Black. Eyes: Blue.

The security officer waved a goodbye and now Pitt became alarmed. "Wait . . . look, why do I have to talk to her at all? Isn't it enough just to return her passport?"

"No, it isn't. But I'm busy this morning and somebody has to talk to her one last time, to see if she can add anything to what she said yesterday. Didn't you see that second cable from Saigon? No, you wouldn't. You see, Pitt, her husband didn't just die in Vietnam. He was murdered."

Dear God, said Pitt to himself, isn't that the way everyone dies down there?

Bates went on. "He was a doctor, apparently a good one, who volunteered for an army tour. Dr. George Martin. He was stabbed to death in a Saigon hotel room, in bed."

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Small alarms fluttered in Pitt's stomach. "By the Viet Cong?"

"Maybe, and maybe not. According to the cable, a hotel maid saw someone go into his room the night he was killed. The maid says it was a foreigner."

"American?"

"American, Frenchman, what have you. It may even have been a woman which, for some reason, the Saigon police think it was."

"Has Mrs. Martin heard any of this?" Pitt asked apprehensively, wondering if he would have to tell her.

"She knows everything we know. She wanted it all, though she didn't like the news about the possibility of a woman. It does seem out of character. Two people here at the consulate knew Martin and say he was the most dedicated, morally upright man on earth."

"Do the Saigon police suspect anyone?"

"I don't know, but there's no point in playing detective. We've checked every angle. I even thought of Mrs. Martin herself, because she could have tried to go to Saigon as a tourist. But Hong Kong Immigration say she hasn't left the colony since she arrived here a week ago. Which reminds me, I've got a meeting this morning and I'm late now." He began to talk faster. "Look, be a good fellow. Just ask her if she remembers anything else that might help the Saigon police. I'll be at Immigration all morning—you know the number. But don't call unless it's important."

Bates strode out and Harold Pitt looked down at the passport in his hands.

He had five minutes alone with the document and gave it his usual examination, although he felt distaste for the passport, the security officer, and the entire affair. He checked vital statistics and the itinerary sketched by the small stamps. She had not traveled much.

He looked again at the photograph and wondered if the milk-clear complexion was natural or from a retoucher's hand. The eyes smiled at him from the page.

He seldom met the people whose documents passed through his hands, but he often visualized them and saw himself meeting them, dealing with them, helping them. He was not really effective with people. But daydreams did no harm.

Mrs. Martin was difficult to imagine for there was something different about her. Perhaps the birthplace, England, explained it. Her eyes were her best feature.

Suddenly, with a start, he realized someone was in front of his desk.

She was smiling and Pitt knew she had been watching. She wore black but the effect was not mournful or somber. Everything was there—the perfect skin, the aristocratic

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face, the shining eyes. Her dark hair, long and almost as black as her suit, was swept up and arranged properly on her head. The passport photograph said little about the real Mrs. Martin and nothing at all about her figure. It filled the dark clothing tastefully but to excellent effect. And he had forgotten how tall 5 feet 10 inches is in a woman.

He stood up and waited for her to speak.

"You must be Mr. Pitt," she said in tones strongly British. "I was directed to see you. Has my passport been renewed?"

"No, Mrs. Martin, it hasn't. But it doesn't require renewal for almost two years."

"Really? I never do get these things straight. If I can have it I won't trouble you further. Everyone has been very kind." She held out her hand.

It was an awkward moment that Pitt was to remember later. He could give her the passport and the matter would be finished. But he was to ask questions. And, he had to admit, he wished she would not leave too quickly.

He found his voice. "Could you spare a few moments, Mrs. Martin? I'd like to ask—that is, I'd like to be sure we have everything correct about what has happened."

"About George?" she said. "I'll be glad to help if I can tell you anything beyond what I've told Mr. Bates. No, don't be afraid to discuss it. I've quite recovered."

Flustered by her self-assurance, he realized he had forgotten his manners. "Please sit down."

She sat and smiled at him. "There's really nothing more to tell unless it's personal history you want. George and I were married two years ago in New York. We met while I was on holiday there. He was a dedicated doctor—too dedicated, I thought. Soon after we were married he went abroad on an assignment for the American Government." She stopped and sat very still.

Pitt tried to help with a question. "Was it then you became an American citizen?"

"Yes. George said it would be a good idea, and they did it quickly because he was going overseas." Again she stopped.

He wanted to keep her talking, but nothing came to his mind except questions born of examining thousands of passports. Name, place of birth, date of birth. Pamela Scott Martin, Manchester, England, November 20, 1928. He had this information already. Would she talk more about herself?

"Did you travel much before you married?"

"Goodness, no. When I crossed the Atlantic it was my first time out of Britain. But after we married I wanted to travel everywhere. I spent months planning this trip."

Pitt felt uneasy but he did not know why. Perhaps it was because small talk was useless and he would

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soon have to let her go. But he could decently return, one last time, to the unhappy subject of her husband.

She shook her head. No, she could add nothing more.

A fear that he had forgotten something crept over Pitt and he became aware of the document still in his hands. He forced himself to leaf through it again. A little advice would not hurt. "In the circumstances, Mrs. Martin, it would be well to keep your passport in a safe place."

"Oh? Why?"

"It's just that there may be more questions asked after you get home and—well, it would be best not to lose it."

"I don't understand."

He wondered why she did not see his point. "To be blunt, Mrs. Martin, it shows you were not in Saigon at the time your husband died. Countries in this part of the world make entries in your passport whenever you visit them. Your passport has no Vietnamese stamps. It might help you."

Her eyes widened. "Really, that's too ridiculous. Do you mean I'll be suspected of murdering my own husband?"

"I mean you should keep your passport safely available. At the same time, you should be ready for one or two questions about it."

"But what questions? You said it would clear me."

It was rude not to reply at once, but for a moment he was silent as he looked again at her passport, trying in his mind to answer the puzzles in its pages. He chose his words carefully. "I only said it might help you, Mrs. Martin. Any passport raises questions. For example, you got this one a year after you married and became a United States citizen. Yet you've said you were interested in travel from the time of your marriage. Why did you wait so long to get the passport?"

"What do you mean?" Her voice had a slight edge.

"Nothing, except that it raises the possibility of another passport."

"Another . . . but this is the only one I've ever had."

It was hard to believe she could actually forget, though he wanted to believe she could. "This may be the only American passport you've ever had, Mrs. Martin. But at one time you must have had a British one. You crossed the Atlantic on something. You see, that's the sort of question you must be ready for."

"It all seems so silly and irrelevant," she said, obviously annoyed.

Everything he said made matters worse, but he had to go on. "And they—the police, the F.B.I., someone—may ask when you got your British passport."

"How should I remember? I suppose it was just before I went to New York."

"Well, then, your British passport is probably still good. I believe

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they're valid for five years, and you see—"

"What *are* you getting at?" she demanded.

"Why, I—I—"

"Mr. Pitt, all that was a long time ago. I wasn't married and I lived a completely different life. I can't be expected to recall every little detail."

"Of course," he said, half to himself, "a different life. You weren't even Mrs. Martin then."

She started, and looked angrily at him. "I think I should go now. You're no longer being helpful. You're prying. We've talked enough about my past." She stood up quickly.

Aghast, Pitt saw that she was trembling. She was leaving and all rapport was suddenly gone. So he spoke his final words as though he were lecturing a naughty schoolgirl.

"I was only trying to warn you, Mrs. Martin. If there are questions to be asked, someone will ask them until they get answers. And they may want to know why you turned your passport in to the consulate for renewal when it still has nearly two years to go."

She snatched it from his hands.

"Now you're making accusations!" Her voice rose. "Do you think I gave my passport in for renewal just to make it look as if I were still in Hong Kong when I really went to Saigon? Are you saying I killed my own husband? *Are you?*"

He tried to quiet her, knowing her voice could be heard in other offices. But she would not stop.

"Perhaps you think I killed him for his money! That would make sense, wouldn't it? He had lots of it, if you want the truth, and he was a filthy miser. He never gave me anything. I used my own money even for this trip! Maybe the only way to get money out of him," she shouted, "was to kill him!" Tears suddenly welled in her eyes as she whirled and ran from the room.

"No, no, Mrs. Martin. I didn't—" But it was too late; she would not stop now. He sat down heavily and tried to piece together what had happened. After a moment of numbness, the years of discipline slowly took hold until he was only partly aware of what he did. He picked up the telephone and dialed.

"Immigration here," said a British voice.

"May I speak to Mr. Malcolm Bates of the American Consulate?" He felt his own heart pounding. When Bates's voice came on the line he took a deep breath. "Hello. This is Pitt."

"Oh, for God's sake, Pitt. Don't tell me Mrs. Martin's giving you trouble."

Pitt ignored this. "Would you ask your friends there if they have any record of a Miss Pamela Scott, British passport?"

Bates's voice dropped to a whis-

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per. "What is this, Pitt? I don't like to ask these people about their own nationals. It's poor liaison policy. Is it important?"

"It is. Pamela Scott may have been Mrs. Martin's maiden name." He heard Bates lay the phone down. A long silence followed which was only a few minutes but seemed an hour.

Then Bates's voice came excitedly from the receiver. "Hello! Hello! Pitt? Listen! Miss Pamela Scott, British passport, left Hong Kong on Air Vietnam the 10th of—"

Pitt slowly took the phone from his ear. After a moment he put it back.

"—re-entered Hong Kong two days later on Air—listen, Pitt. Keep her there until I get back. Do you hear me?"

"She's gone," he said quietly.

"*Gone?* For God's sake, *where?*"

"Probably to her hotel in Kowloon." He ignored Bates's curses and put the phone down, for he had done what he had to do.

Then a chill swept through him. *Kowloon!*

He bolted from the room, ran down the corridor, down the stairs two at a time, and out the front door past a startled Marine guard.

Down the hill he raced, down the curving streets, through the traffic to the pier. Breathlessly he pushed his way through the crowds and then, his legs nearly buckling, he hurried down the long enclosed ferry slip.

She was not there.

A ferry that had just left was already too far away to see whether she was on board, but he watched it move toward Kowloon. When it was little more than a dot in the center of the Bay it suddenly turned and circled, and circled, and circled, as if looking for a suicide. . .

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THE THEFT OF THE CLOUDED TIGER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

MOSTLY HE JUST LIKED TO SIT on the front steps with a beer, watching the homebound workers from the electronics plant down the block, pleased that he wasn't one of them. Sometimes, after supper, Gloria would join him on the steps to see the neighborhood fathers playing ball with their boys in the lot across the street, then watch them stroll down to the corner grocery for a forgotten loaf of bread or pack of smokes. It was a peaceful, settled neighborhood—that was why he liked it. No curious neighbors, no snooping.

"Nicky?"

"Huh?" He glanced up at Gloria, perched on the porch railing, swinging her long legs in graceful rhythm. She was a great girl, but she always wanted to talk.

"Nicky, what do you do when you go away?"

"Travel, like I told you. These companies hire me to pick new plant sites. There's a lot of money in it." He sipped his beer from the punctured can, wishing she'd quiet down for once and let him breathe in the evening air.

"When will they send you out again, Nicky?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think some day we'll be able to get married and settle down?"

He'd often considered marrying Gloria. Sometimes he could even imagine himself spending the rest of his life on this little street, walking up to the corner for beer in the evening. He could imagine it, but not for too long. "Some day," he said, because that was the answer to everything.

It was later, almost ten o'clock, when the telephone rang. She brushed his hand from her thigh and rose in the darkness to answer it. "For you," she called out.

He took the telephone and heard

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an unfamiliar voice ask, "Is this Nick Velvet?"

"Yes."

"We'd like to talk to you about a job."

"Tonight?"

"If you can come over. Foster Hotel, Room 229."

Nick smiled at the telephone. "I don't meet people in hotel rooms. They're only for sleeping and making love."

"All right, where?"

"The park across from the hotel. By the fountain."

"In the dark?" the voice asked, uncertain.

"I do my best work in the dark. Eleven o'clock—and come alone."

"How will I know you?"

Nick smiled again. "I'll know you," he said and hung up. He always knew them. They always looked the same.

Gloria came in off the porch. "Who was it, Nicky?"

"A job. Be back around midnight."

He picked up his jacket on the way out the door. Sometimes the nights were cool.

Nick Velvet was a product of New York's Greenwich Village, in an era when the Italian-American population still dominated the section against the encroachment of the bohemians. He'd shortened his name from an original version that sounded like a cheese, and gone off to the wars with a good many other high school dropouts.

Somehow, over the years, his life's work had begun to take shape, and now—nearing 40—he was an acknowledged expert. They phoned him now, and made trips to see him, because for certain jobs he had no equal in the world.

Nick Velvet was a thief. Of a special sort.

He never stole money as such, and never stole on his own. Rather, he stole on assignment, taking the things that were too big or too dangerous or too unusual for other thieves. He'd stolen from museums, from corporations, from governments. He'd stolen a statue of the Roman god Mercury from the top of a Post Office building, and a stained glass window from a museum of medieval art. Once he'd even stolen a complete baseball team, including manager, coaches, and equipment.

It wasn't so much that he liked the work, or had planned it as a career. But when it happened he had voiced no complaints. The fees were substantial, and he worked only four or five times a year, for no more than a week or so at a time. He saw a good deal of the world, and he met some highly interesting people.

Harry Smith was not one of the most interesting.

He stood in the shadows by the fountain, looking for all the world like a gangster of the prohibition era waiting for the boat from Canada.

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Nick didn't like his looks, and when he said his name was Smith, Nick didn't like his name, either.

"A man in Chicago recommended you, Velvet," Smith said, clipping off the worlds like an electric typewriter.

"Could be. What do you want?"

"Do we have to talk here? I have a hotel room."

Nick Velvet smiled. "Hotel rooms can be bugged too easily. I don't like tape recordings of my business deals."

Harry Smith shrugged. "Hell, these days they can bug you anywhere. They could be aiming one of them long-range things at us right now."

"That's why we're standing by the fountain. It's quite effective for covering up conversations. Now get to the point."

Harry Smith stepped into the circle of light cast by a tree-shrouded lamp overhead. He was a bulky man, built like a small gorilla, and both cheeks were pockmarked. "We want you to steal something," he said.

"I assumed as much. My price is high."

"How high?"

"Twenty thousand and up, depending on the job."

Harry Smith took a step backward into the shadows. "We want you to steal a tiger from a zoo."

Nick had learned long ago to control his reactions. He simply nodded and said, "Tell me about it."

"It's in the city—the Glen Park Zoo. Something called a 'clouded' tiger. Supposed to be rare."

"How rare?"

The man shrugged, and Nick was somehow reminded of a gorilla again. "A Middle Eastern prince with a private zoo is willing to pay well for the beast. We can afford your twenty thousand."

"Thirty for animals," Nick told him. "There is more danger involved."

"I'll have to ask the others."

"Do that. You know where to reach me."

"Wait!" Harry Smith grabbed Nick's shoulder. "We want to do this thing in three days—on Monday morning. We should decide tonight."

"I'd have to look the zoo over first."

"You'd have tomorrow and Sunday for that."

"Thirty thousand?"

The man hesitated only a moment longer. "All right. Five in advance."

They shook hands on it, and Nick Velvet went back to Gloria's to pack his bag. The night was hesitant with the beginnings of an overcast, and above his head the stars were gradually going out.

There were three of them—Harry Smith, and a tall slim Englishman named Cormick, and a youngish

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blonde girl who answered to Jeanie. The girl seemed to be with Cormick, and it was obvious that the Englishman was the brains of the operation. He ordered Harry Smith around in the flat monotone so often used for servants.

"I'll need to look the place over," Nick told them again.

Cormick shrugged his lean shoulders. "Look all you want."

"Why does it have to be Monday morning?"

"You're not paid to ask questions, Mr. Velvet."

They'd left the hotel room and were sitting now in a little house trailer hooked on behind a new black convertible. The car and trailer, like the girl, belonged to Cormick.

"Tell me something about the tiger," Nick said, sipping a glass of warm scotch.

Cormick might have been lecturing a class in Zoology I. "Though the ordinary tiger is quite common in zoos, there are a number of rare specimens that are highly valued. The great heavy-coated Siberian tiger is an extremely rare zoo specimen, as is the albino tiger, and the blue-gray tiger known to parts of China. But the so-called 'clouded' tiger—a strangely mottled beast long thought to be legendary—is perhaps the rarest of all. This specimen was captured near the Sino-Indian border a few years ago and donated to the Glen Park Zoo. It may be the only one in captivity, and our prince will pay dearly for it."

"I'll need some equipment."

The Englishman nodded. "We have a small closed pickup truck, and Jeanie can be your driver. The job is to get the tiger out of its cage and into the truck, and then to get the truck away from the zoo."

Nick lit a cigarette. "Is the zoo guarded?"

Cormick nodded. "They've got a squad of private patrolmen, mainly to keep the teen-agers in line. I understand they had some trouble last year with the animals being annoyed."

"Protecting the animals from the people." Nick chuckled for the first time and began to relax. The old feeling of success was beginning to course through his veins. He never liked them to seem too easy. Then, as if he'd just thought of it, he said, "I'd better take Jeanie with me in the morning. A man alone at the zoo might look suspicious."

Cormick hesitated only a moment before indicating his approval with a wave of his hand. "If you wish. It might be a good idea, since she'll be with you Monday."

"Where will you two be?" Nick asked.

"Here in the trailer, waiting for you. We have a plane waiting to fly the beast to Canada and then on to the Middle East."

"You'll have trouble getting a tiger out of the country," Nick said. "How are you planning to do it?"

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Cormick merely smiled. "Do I ask you how you plan to steal him in the first place?"

Nick took out another cigarette. "I'm glad you don't. At this point I have no idea how I'm going to do it."

Saturday morning was breezy, with high white clouds that glided swiftly across the sun in irregular formation. Nick helped Jeanie from her car and guided her around a puddle left over from an early morning shower. It was a day for the zoo, and even this early the parking lot was beginning to fill.

Nick dropped two quarters in the turnstile and they passed through. "I can remember when city zoos were free," he commented.

"They still are, in smaller cities. Here they have to pay for guards." She motioned toward a uniformed man standing near the polar bears. There was a revolver on his hip, and he wore the square silver badge of a local security service.

"Do they need to carry those guns?"

Jeanie shrugged. "Probably not loaded."

"We'll assume they are. Where's this clouded tiger?"

"Down this way. Let's stop in the monkey house first, in case the guard is watching."

She was a smart girl, with brains that even showed through the blonde hair and the long-legged fullness of her body. He liked being with her, even at the zoo. Even in the monkey house.

After a time they drifted toward the big cats, while Nick carefully observed the zoo's routine—a truckful of dirt coming through a service gate in the fence, a keeper hosing down the concrete near the seals, an aging vendor inflating balloons from a tank of gas. Something back near the front gate caught Nick's eye and he asked, "What's the armored car for?"

She glanced over her shoulder. "Picking up yesterday's haul of quarters."

"Quarters are money."

"Forget it. On a good week-end they're lucky to get two or three thousand dollars. We're after big game."

He paused in front of the cage they sought. "It's big, all right."

The clouded tiger was a massive, mocking beast with mottled fur unlike anything Nick had ever seen. The animal paced its cage with a vibrant stride that seemed to shout its superiority, even over the lion and the more orthodox tiger in the adjoining cages. It was not a beast to meet on a dark night near the Sino-Indian border; it was not even a beast to meet on a sunny Saturday afternoon at the zoo.

"I don't like him." Jeanie shuddered. "He looks as if he could pounce right through those bars."

"Maybe he could. My job is to get him through, somehow."

"Cormick is crazy! Who ever

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heard of stealing a tiger from a zoo?"

Nick smiled. "I've stolen stranger things—ten tons of slot machines, once." But his eyes were busy. The cages all had connecting gates, but the ones on either side of the clouded tiger were heavily bolted. A door in the rear wall led into the beast's den, and the only other exit was a small gate at the front of the cage, for feeding and cleaning purposes He studied the padlocked chain on the gate and decided it would present no problem.

"Seen enough, Nick?" she asked him finally.

"I guess so."

They strolled down by the camels and then stood for a time watching a shaggy old bison who almost seemed to realize it was one of the last. The animal depressed Nick, and he was glad to get back to the car.

Cormick was pouring drinks when they returned to the trailer. He smiled and held out a glass for Nick. "I thought you might have the tiger with you."

"I thought you wanted it on Monday."

Harry Smith settled into a chair. "That's right—Monday morning at a quarter to ten."

"Why such close timing?"

The Englishman sipped his drink. "We've made arrangements for the plane at that time. Can you get the tiger then?"

"It would be easier at night," Nick said.

"Not with those guards around. You'd never get by the front entrance. At least in the daytime you can walk right up to the cage without attracting attention."

Nick leaned against the wall, eyeing Jeanie's long legs as she settled into a chair. "Sometimes it isn't all bad, attracting attention. Now tell me your plans for after I get the tiger."

"Jeanie will be driving the pickup truck," Cormick said. "She'll follow your orders until you're away from the zoo, then she'll drive you to the meeting place. We'll pay you the rest of the money there and take over the truck. It's our job to get the animal on the plane for Canada."

"Will that truck hold the tiger?"

"Steel sheeting with a few air holes. It will hold him."

Nick Velvet nodded. "I have to pick up a few things. Be back before dark."

He borrowed Jeanie's car and drove to the city—to a laboratory supply house that happened to be open on a Saturday afternoon. There he purchased an ugly-looking pellet gun that fired tranquilizing darts. Just in case the tiger got nasty about its kidnaping . . .

On Sunday afternoon Nick went back to the zoo with Jeanie because he wanted to study the keepers' uniforms. And, incidentally, because

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he wanted to study Jeanie. "How did you meet Cormick?" he asked as they strolled near the reptile house.

"How do those things ever happen? I was a dancer in a little off-Broadway musical, with dreams of doing my own choreography some day. He said he'd help—invest some money."

"Did he?"

"After this job, he says. It's always after just one more job. But he's not a bad guy. He keeps Harry in his place."

"How long have the three of you been together?"

"About a year. Harry had a girl for a while, but she took off. He used to beat her, and she didn't like it."

"How did Cormick hear about me?"

She turned to smile at him. "You're famous in certain circles Nick Velvet. But I never thought you'd be so handsome."

Nick wasn't handsome and he knew it. He stopped looking at her legs and started to worry. "Let's go back," he suggested.

On the way out he stopped at the balloon vendor's stand and purchased two balloons, a blue one and a red one. The blue one he gave to Jeanie, but he released the red one and watched its progress as it rose with the slight breeze. He watched it for quite a long time, and then they left.

Monday dawned rainy, and Nick cursed his luck. He was about to suggest a postponement, but by eight o'clock the sky was beginning to brighten and the rain had settled into a half-hearted drizzle.

They met for a final conference in the trailer and Cormick shook his hand.

"Good luck, Nick. The rest of the money will be waiting for you."

"Can't you tell me where you'll be?"

"Jeanie knows. We'll see you this afternoon."

Nick dressed quickly in a close approximation of the work clothes worn by the keepers. Then he followed Jeanie in the truck while she parked her car at a suburban shopping center.

"All right, boss," she said, getting behind the wheel of the truck. "What are my orders?"

"The service gate will be open. We'll drive in there and then I'll leave you. From there you can see the tiger's cage, and as soon as I reach it you start driving toward it, slowly. You'll have to turn the truck around and back up to the railing outside the cage. That'll be the tricky part."

"What will the guards be doing all this time?"

He told her.

"You're quite a guy, Nick Velvet. Will it work?"

"If it doesn't, I'll have a lapful of clouded tiger."

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"Should we buy another balloon, just to make sure?"

He studied the sky for a moment, watching the progress of fluffy white clouds. "No, the wind direction is about the same as yesterday." He checked the bulges in his various pockets, and decided the two of them were ready.

As Jeanie drove the truck slowly through the service gate, a uniformed zoo patrolman turned toward them curiously and started walking in their direction. Nick left the truck and hurried forward.

"You working here?" the patrolman called out.

"Cleaning the tiger cage."

"Huh?" the patrolman kept coming, looking puzzled.

"Somebody threw a bottle in there during the night. Broken glass." Nick hoped that the real keepers hadn't already found the glass and removed it. He'd had to hurl the bottle over the fence from a distance of fifty feet, but his throwing arm was still good. It had dropped into the right cage and smashed in one corner of the clouded tiger's domain.

The patrolman turned and stared at the broken glass and the pacing tiger. "Damn fool, whoever did that! I'll make out a report."

"The night man reported it."

"Huh? All right." He started to turn away as Nick jumped over the outer railing in front of the cage. Then, as an afterthought, the patrolman asked, "You got an identification card? I don't remember you."

"Wait till I finish this," Nick told him. "I need both hands." He shielded the padlock with his body and snapped the chain with a quick pressure of powerful wire cutters.

"What . . . ?"

But now the cage door was beginning to raise, and Nick hoped that Jeanie was getting the truck into position. "Stand clear, officer. We don't want an accident."

"You going to clean the cage with those wire cutters, wise guy? Who the hell are you?"

Nick brought the heavy cutters up quickly, catching the guard on the temple. He gasped and started to go down, as Nick's other hand pulled something else from his pocket.

Jeanie arrived with the truck, and was backing it into position. Somebody shouted and Nick turned to see a keeper running toward them. Far off, near the gate, another guard had turned in their direction.

Nick paused only an instant to gauge the wind direction again, then hurled two smoke bombs at the oncoming figures.

"Nick!"

"Hurry! We've only got a minute!" He pulled a plank from the truck and laid it across the railing to the cage door. Then he tossed another smoke bomb into the cage and pulled the door open all the way.

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The tiger, momentarily terrified, turned toward its den, then changed its mind and bolted out of the cage, up the plank, and into the waiting truck.

"Done!" Nick yelled, yanking out the plank and slamming shut the steel door of the pickup truck. "Let's get out!"

One of the guards had made it through the smokescreen and was pawing at his holster when they heard the shots.

"Those came from the main gate," Nick said, scrambling onto the seat next to the girl. "What's going on?"

She didn't answer, but thumped hard on the accelerator, shooting the truck forward through the service gate. He'd been prepared to smash through, but the gate was still open. Behind them a patrolman fired one wild shot and then they were away.

"This truck won't be safe for long," Jeanie said.

Nick glanced out the side window as the truck roared past the zoo entrance. The armored car was there, standing at the main gate with its door open. Two uniformed men were stretched out on the pavement near it.

"Never mind the truck," Nick growled. "What about that?"

"What?"

"You know damn well what! Your friends have played me for a prize patsy!"

She spun the steering wheel like an expert, cutting off suddenly onto a side road. It was dusty and bumpy, and almost at once the tiger started to growl.

"You're getting paid," she told him. "Stop complaining."

"Cormick didn't want the tiger at all! You didn't even care if I got it. The whole thing was just a diversion while Cormick and Smith knocked off the armored car."

"I didn't know there'd be any shooting," she said, keeping her eyes on the road.

"If the guards caught me you'd have left me there. Did you do all this for a few thousand dollars in quarters?"

She snorted in disdain. "Use your head, Nick. The armored car stops at branch banks on its Monday morning run. With any luck we've got close to a million bucks!"

"They waited inside the zoo, jumped the armored car men, and took their keys. Both armored car men came into the zoo?"

"They always did," she told him. "They figured it was a safe stop, like a church. All we had to do was distract the zoo guards somehow. That's where you came in."

"And I also make a good fall guy for the cops to chase."

"I'm sorry, Nick." Behind them the tiger roared again.

"I'll bet you are! You just came along to keep me on schedule."

"That's about it. I'm leaving you with the truck and this damned tiger and taking my car."

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"Where are you meeting them?"

"Sorry, Nick. You're not making the trip."

He reached past her leg and switched off the ignition. The truck shuddered and rolled to a stop on the narrow dirt road. "Tell me," he ordered.

Jeanie yanked open the door on her side and began to run as soon as she hit the dirt. He sprang after her, and she turned quickly, her hand coming out of her shoulder bag.

"I can take care of myself, Nick," she said, swinging a tiny pistol toward his stomach.

"You crazy fool!" His own hand had moved almost as fast—to the pellet gun he carried in a bulky side pocket. He dropped to his knees and squeezed the trigger, putting a tranquilizer dart into the wrist of her gun hand a split second before she fired.

Nick left her sleeping in a field and drove the truck to the shopping center where she'd left the car. Already the news of the robbery was on the radio, and he listened with a kind of foggy indifference.

"Two armored car guards were slain this morning in a daring holdup at the Glen Park Zoo. The zoo's patrolmen, distracted by the theft of a tiger from its cage, were unable to assist the armored car personnel. The two masked gunmen escaped with an estimated seven hundred thousand dollars, while another man and a girl were stealing the tiger. The missing beast —a rare clouded variety—is described as being extremely dangerous."

Nick switched off the radio as he turned into the shopping center, then changed his mind and turned up some loud music. The tiger was beginning to growl again. Nick wondered if there might really be a prince willing to pay $30,000 for the animal.

He found a road map in the glove compartment of Jeanie's car, and studied it carefully. Four circles had been drawn with pencil. He frowned and thought about it. Cormick and Smith wouldn't be near the zoo, or the airport, or the last place he'd seen the trailer. That left only one logical circle, and he decided to chance it.

"Say, mister," somebody called as he went back to the truck, "you got an animal in there?"

He smiled at the man. "My dog. He's a big fellow."

"Sounds like it."

Nick was still smiling as he wheeled the truck onto the highway. He hoped he wouldn't have to use the tranquilizer gun again.

There was a trailer camp where the circle had been drawn on the map, but Cormick and Smith were not there. Nick parked the truck in some nearby woods and waited. It was almost dark before they pulled in, near the edge of the

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camp. Nick smiled for the first time in hours.

When it was dark he slowly backed the truck against the side of the trailer and got out. "What in hell's that growling?" he heard Harry Smith ask from inside. Nick unlocked the back of the truck.

It was Cormick who opened the trailer door, pistol in hand. "Who's there? That you, Jeanie?"

"One tiger, as ordered, Cormick."

"Velvet!"

"Hungry and mean, but in good condition." Nick opened the back door of the truck.

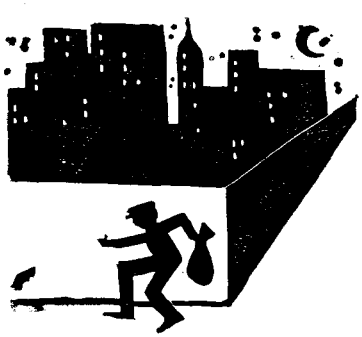
The tiger leaped for the lighted trailer and made it to Cormick in a single bound. Behind him, Harry Smith started to scream.

Afterward, Nick used the tranquilizer gun on the tiger and then scooped up the loot of the holdup. He pushed through a gathering crowd of frightened spectators and drove away as the first police car was coming down the road . . .

Nick Velvet stopped at the corner grocery for a six-pack of cold beer. He walked slowly, enjoying the feel of the warm evening, until he came in sight of the house and saw Gloria waiting for him on the porch. Then he smiled and started walking faster.

"Hello, Nicky," she said. "Home to stay?"

"For a while," he answered, and opened a couple of beers.



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***The Dream House of Shiraz***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Mr. Parker Pyne
LOCALE:	Persia
TIME:	A generation ago
COMMENTS:	*"Are you happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne"—the famous "Personal" advertisement that brought Mr. Pyne so many of his cases involving heart and homicide . . .*

IT WAS SIX IN THE MORNING WHEN Mr. Parker Pyne left for Persia after a stop in Baghdad.

The passenger space in the little plane was limited, and the small width of the seats was not such as to accommodate the bulk of Mr. Parker Pyne with anything like comfort. There were two fellow passengers—a large florid man whom Mr. Parker Pyne judged to be of a talkative habit, and a thin woman with pursed lips and a determined air.

At any rate, thought Mr. Parker Pyne, *they don't look as though they would want to consult me professionally.*

Nor did they. The little woman was an American missionary, full of hard work and happiness, and the florid man was employed by an oil company. They had given their fellow passenger a résumé of their lives before the plane started.

"I am merely a tourist, I am afraid," Mr. Parker Pyne had said deprecatingly. "I am going to Teheran and Isfahan and Shiraz."

And the sheer music of the names enchanted him so much as he said them that he repeated them. Teheran. Isfahan. Shiraz.

Mr. Parker Pyne looked out at the country below him. It was flat desert. He felt the mystery of these vast, unpopulated regions.

At Kermanshah the plane came down for passport examinations and customs. A bag of Mr. Parker

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Pyne's was opened. A certain small cardboard box was scrutinized with some excitement. Questions were asked. Since Mr. Parker Pyne did not speak or understand Persian, the matter was difficult.

The pilot strolled up. He was a fair-haired young German, a fine-looking man, with deep blue eyes and a weather-beaten face. "Please?" he inquired pleasantly.

Mr. Parker Pyne, who had been indulging in some excellent realistic pantomime without, it seemed, much success, turned to him with relief. "It's bug powder," he said. "Do you think you could explain to them?"

The pilot looked puzzled. "Please?"

Mr. Parker Pyne repeated his plea in German. The pilot grinned and translated the sentence into Persian. The grave and sad officials were pleased; their sorrowful faces relaxed; they smiled. One even laughed. They found the idea humorous.

The three passengers took their places again and the flight continued. They swooped down at Hamadan to drop the mails, but the plane did not stop. Mr. Parker Pyne peered down, trying to see if he could distinguish the rock of Behistun, that romantic spot where Darius describes the extent of his empire and conquests in three different languages—Babylonian, Median, and Persian.

It was one o'clock when they arrived at Teheran. There were more police formalities. The German pilot had come up and was standing by smiling as Mr. Parker Pyne finished answering a long interrogation which he had not understood.

"What have I said?" he asked of the German.

"That your father's Christian name is Tourist, that your profession is Charles, that the maiden name of your mother is Baghdad, and that you have come from Harriet."

"Does it matter?"

"Not the least in the world. Just answer something; that is all they need."

Parker Pyne was disappointed in Teheran. He found it distressingly modern. He said as much the following evening when he happened to run into Herr Schlegel, the pilot, just as he was entering his hotel. On an impulse he asked the other man to dine, and the German accepted.

The Georgian waiter hovered over them and issued his orders. The food arrived. When they had reached the stage of *la tourte,* a somewhat sticky confection of chocolate, the German said, "So you go to Shiraz?"

"Yes, I shall fly there. Then I shall come back from Shiraz to Isfahan and Teheran by road. Is it you who will fly me to Shiraz tomorrow?"

"*Ach*, no. I return to Bagdad."

"You have been here long?"

"Three years. It has only been es-

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tablished three years, our service. So far, we have never had an accident —*unberufen!*" He touched the table.

Thick cups of sweet coffee were brought. The two men smoked.

"My first passengers were two ladies," said the German reminiscently. "Two English ladies."

"Yes?" said Parker Pyne.

"The one she was a young lady very well born, the daughter of one of your ministers, the—how does one say it?—the Lady Esther Carr. She was handsome, very handsome, but mad."

"Mad?"

"Completely mad. She lives there at Shiraz in a big native house. She wears Eastern dress. She will see no Europeans. Is that a life for a well born lady to live?"

"There have been others," said Parker Pyne. "There was Lady Hester Stanhope—"

"This one is mad," said the other abruptly. "You could see it in her eyes. Just so have I seen the eyes of my submarine commander in the war. He is now in an asylum."

Mr. Parker Pyne was thoughtful. He remembered Lord Micheldever, Lady Esther Carr's father, well. He had worked under him when the latter was Home Secretary—a big blond man with laughing blue eyes. He had seen Lady Micheldever once—a noted Irish beauty with her black hair and violet-blue eyes. They were both handsome, normal people, but for all that there *was* insanity in the Carr family. It cropped out every now and then, after missing a generation. It was very odd, he thought, that Herr Schlegel should stress the point.

"And the other lady?" he asked idly.

"The other lady—is dead."

Something in his voice made Parker Pyne look up sharply.

"I have a heart," said Herr Schlegel. "I feel. She was, to me, most beautiful, that lady. You know how it is, these things come over you all of a sudden. She was a flower—a flower."

He sighed deeply. "I went to see them once—at the house at Shiraz. The Lady Esther, she asked me to come. My little one, my flower, she was afraid of something—I could see it. When next I came back from Baghdad, I hear that she is dead. Dead!"

He paused and then said thoughtfully, "It might be that the other one killed her. She was mad, I tell you."

He sighed, and Parker Pyne ordered two Benedictines.

"The curaçao, it is good," said the Georgian waiter, and brought them two curaçaos.

Just after noon the following day Mr. Parker Pyne had his first view of Shiraz. They had flown over mountain ranges with narrow, desolate valleys between, and all arid, parched, dry wilderness. Then suddenly Shiraz came into view—an

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emerald-green jewel in the heart of the wilderness.

Parker Pyne enjoyed Shiraz as he had not enjoyed Teheran. The primitive character of the hotel did not appall him, nor the equally primitive character of the streets.

He found himself in the midst of a Persian holiday. The Nan Ruz festival had begun on the previous evening—the fifteen-day period in which the Persians celebrate their New Year. He wandered through the empty bazaars and passed out into the great open stretch of common on the north side of the city. All Shiraz was celebrating.

One day he walked just outside the town. He had been to the tomb of Hafiz the poet, and it was on returning that he saw and was fascinated by a house. A house all tiled in blue and rose and yellow, set in a green garden with water and orange trees and roses. It was, he felt, the house of a dream.

That night he was dining with the English consul and he asked about the house.

"Fascinating place, isn't it? It was built by a former wealthy governor of Luristan, who had made a good thing out of his official position. An Englishwoman's got it now. You must have heard of her. Lady Esther Carr. Mad as a hatter. Gone completely native. Won't have anything to do with anything or anyone British."

"Is she young?"

"Too young to play the fool in this way. She's about thirty."

"There was another Englishwoman with her, wasn't there? A woman who died?"

"Yes; that was about three years ago. Happened the day after I took up my post here, as a matter of fact. Barham, my predecessor, died suddenly, you know."

"How did she die?" Parker Pyne asked bluntly.

"Fell from that courtyard or balcony place on the first floor. She was Lady Esther's maid or companion, I forget which. Anyway, she was carrying the breakfast tray and stepped back over the edge. Very sad; nothing to be done; cracked her skull on the stone below."

"What was her name?"

"King, I think; or was it Wills? No, that's the missionary woman. Rather a nice-looking girl."

"Was Lady Esther upset?"

"Yes—no, I don't know. She was very queer about it—I couldn't make her out. She's a very—well, imperious creature. You can see she is somebody, if you know what I mean; she rather scared me with her commanding ways and her dark, flashing eyes."

He laughed half apologetically, then looked curiously at his companion. Mr. Parker Pyne was apparently staring into space. The match he had just struck to light his cigarette was burning away unheeded in his hand. It burned down to his fingers and he dropped it with an ejaculation of pain. Then

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he saw the consul's astonished expression and smiled.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Wool-gathering, weren't you?"

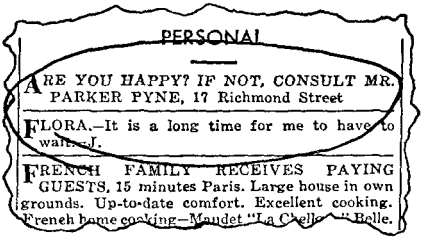
"Three bags full," said Mr. Parker Pyne enigmatically.

They talked of other matters.

That evening, by the light of a small oil lamp, Parker Pyne wrote a letter. He hesitated a good deal over its composition. Yet in the end it was very simple:

Mr. Parker Pyne presents his compliments to Lady Esther Carr and begs to state that he is staying at the Hotel Fars for the next three days should she wish to consult him.

He enclosed a cutting—the famous advertisement:


PERSONAL

ARE YOU HAPPY? IF NOT, CONSULT MR. PARKER PYNE, 17 Richmond Street

FLORA.—It is a long time for me to have to wait.—J.

FRENCH FAMILY RECEIVES PAYING GUESTS, 15 minutes Paris. Large house in own grounds. Up-to-date comfort. Excellent cooking. French home cooking—Maudet "La Chelle" "Belle.

"That ought to do the trick," said Parker Pyne, as he got gingerly into his rather uncomfortable bed. "Let me see, nearly three years; yes, it ought to do it."

On the following day about four o'clock the answer came. It was brought by a Persian servant who knew no English.

Lady Esther Carr will be glad if Mr. Parker Pyne will call upon her at nine o'clock this evening.

Mr. Parker Pyne smiled.

It was the same servant who received him that evening. He was taken through the dark garden and up an outside staircase that led round to the back of the house. From there a door was opened and he passed through into the central court or balcony, which was open to the night. A big divan was placed against the wall and on it reclined a striking figure.

Lady Esther was attired in Eastern robes, and it might have been suspected that one reason for her preference lay in the fact that they suited her rich, Oriental style of beauty. Imperious, the consul had called her, and indeed, imperious she looked. Her chin was held high and her brows were arrogant.

"You are Mr. Parker Pyne? Sit down there."

Her hand pointed to a heap of cushions. On the third finger there flashed a big emerald carved with the arms of her family. It was an heirloom and must be worth a small fortune, Parker Pyne reflected.

He lowered himself obediently, though with a little difficulty. For a man of his figure it is not easy to sit on the ground gracefully.

A servant appeared with coffee. Parker Pyne took his cup and sipped appreciatively.

His hostess had acquired the Oriental habit of infinite leisure. She

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did not rush into conversation. She, too, sipped her coffee with half-closed eyes. At last she spoke.

"So you help unhappy people," she said. "At least, that is what your advertisement claims."

"Yes."

"Why did you send it to me? Is it your way of—doing business on your travels?"

There was something decidedly offensive in her voice, but Parker Pyne ignored it. He answered simply, "No. My idea in traveling is to have a complete holiday from business."

"Then why send it to me?"

"Because I had reason to believe that you—are unhappy."

There was a moment's silence. He was very curious. How would she take that? She gave herself a minute to decide that point. Then she laughed.

"I suppose you thought that anyone who leaves the world, who lives as I do, cut off from my own kind, from my country, must do so because she is unhappy! Sorrow, disappointment—you think something like that drove me into exile? Oh, well, how should you understand? There—in England—I was a fish out of water. Here I am myself. I am an Oriental at heart. I love this seclusion. I dare say you can't understand that. To you, I must seem" —she hesitated for a moment— "mad."

"You're not mad," said Parker Pyne.

There was a good deal of quiet assurance in his voice. She looked at him curiously.

"But they've been saying I am, I suppose. Fools! It takes all kinds to make a world. I'm perfectly happy."

"And yet you told me to come here," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"I will admit I was curious to see you." She hesitated. "Besides, I never want to go back there—to England—but all the same, sometimes I like to hear what is going on in—"

"In the world you have left?"

She acknowledged the sentence with a nod.

Parker Pyne began to talk. His voice, mellow and reassuring, began quietly, then rose ever so little as he emphasized this point and that.

He talked of London, of society gossip, of famous men and women, of new restaurants and new night clubs, of race meetings and shooting parties and country-house scandals. He talked of clothes, of fashions from Paris, of little shops in unfashionable streets where marvelous bargains could be had. He mentioned theaters and cinemas, he gave film news, he described the building of new garden suburbs, and he came last to a homely description of London in the evening, with the trams and the buses and the hurrying crowds going homeward after the day's work and of the little homes awaiting them, and of the whole strange intimate pattern of English family life.

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It was a very remarkable performance, displaying as it did wide and unusual knowledge and a clever marshaling of the facts. Lady Esther's head had dropped; the arrogance of her poise had been abandoned. For some time her tears had been quietly falling, and now that he had finished, she abandoned all pretense and wept openly.

Parker Pyne said nothing. He sat there watching her. His face had the quiet, satisfied expression of one who has conducted an experiment and obtained the desired result.

She raised her head at last. "Well," she said bitterly, "are you satisfied?"

"I think so—now."

"How shall I bear it; how shall I bear it? Never to leave here; never to see—anyone again!" The cry came as though wrung out of her. She caught herself up, flushing. "Well?" she demanded fiercely. "Aren't you going to make the obvious remark? Aren't you going to say, 'If you want to go home so much, why not do so?'"

"No." Parker Pyne shook his head. "It's not nearly so easy as that for you."

For the first time a little look of fear crept into her eyes. "Do you know why I can't go?"

"I think so."

"Wrong." She shook her head. "The reason I can't go is a reason you'd never guess."

"I don't guess," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "I observe—and I classify."

She shook her head. "You don't know anything at all."

"I shall have to convince you, I see," said Parker Pyne pleasantly. "When you came out here, Lady Esther, you flew, I believe, by the new air service from Baghdad."

"Yes?"

"You were flown by a young pilot, Herr Schlegel, who afterward came here to see you."

"Yes."

A different "yes" in some indescribable way—a softer "yes."

"And you had a friend, or companion, who—died." A voice like steel now—cold, offensive.

"My companion."

"Her name was—?"

"Muriel King."

"Were you fond of her?"

"What do you mean, fond?" She paused, checked herself. "She was useful to me."

She said it haughtily and Parker Pyne was reminded of the consul's saying, "You can see she is somebody, if you know what I mean."

"Were you sorry when she died?"

"I—naturally! Really, Mr. Pyne, is it necessary to go into all this?" She spoke angrily, and went on without waiting for an answer. "It has been very good of you to come. But I am a little tired. If you will tell me what I owe you—?"

But Parker Pyne did not move. He showed no signs of taking offense. He went quietly on with his questions. "Since she died, Herr Schlegel has not been to see you.

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Suppose he were to come, would you receive him?"

"Certainly not."

"You'd refuse absolutely?"

"Absolutely. Herr Schlegel will not be admitted."

"Yes," said Parker Pyne thoughtfully. "You could not say anything else."

The defensive armor of her arrogance broke down a little. She said uncertainly, "I—I don't know what you mean."

"Did you know, Lady Esther, that young Schlegel fell in love with Muriel King? He is a sentimental young man. He still treasures her memory."

"Does he?" Her voice was almost a whisper.

"What was she like?"

"What do you mean, what was she like? How do I know?"

"You must have looked at her sometimes," said Parker Pyne mildly.

"Oh, that! She was quite a nice-looking young woman."

"About your own age?"

"Just about." There was a pause, and then she said, "Why do you think that—that Schlegel cared for her?"

"Because he told me so. Yes, yes, in the most unmistakable terms. As I say, he is a sentimental young man. He was glad to confide in me. He was very upset at her dying the way she did."

Lady Esther sprang to her feet. "Do you believe I murdered her?"

Parker Pyne did not spring to his feet. He was not a springing kind of man. "No, my dear child," he said. "I do *not* believe that you murdered her, and that being so, I think the sooner you stop this play-acting and go home, the better."

"What do you mean, play-acting?"

"The truth is, you lost your nerve. Yes, you did. You lost your nerve badly. You thought you'd be accused of murdering your employer."

The girl made a sudden movement.

Parker Pyne went on, "You are not Lady Esther Carr. I knew that before I came here, but I've tested you to make sure." His smile broke out, bland and benevolent. "When I said my little piece just now, I was watching you, and every time you reacted *as Muriel King,* not as Esther Carr. The cheap shops, the cinemas, the new garden suburbs, going home by bus and tram—you reacted to all those. Country-house gossip, new night clubs, the chatter of Mayfair, race meetings—none of those meant anything at all to you."

His voice became even more persuasive and fatherly. "Sit down and tell me about it. You didn't murder Lady Esther, but you thought you might be accused of doing so. Just tell me how it all came about."

She took a long breath; then she sank down once more on the divan and began to speak. Her words came hurriedly, in little bursts.

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"I must begin—at the beginning. I—I was afraid of her. She was mad—not quite mad—just a little. She brought me out here with her. Like a fool, I was delighted; I thought it was so romantic. Little fool. That's what I was, a little fool. There was some business about a chauffeur. She was man-mad—absolutely man-mad. He wouldn't have anything to do with her, and it got out; her friends got to know about it and laughed. And she broke loose from her family and came out here.

"It was all a pose to save her face—solitude in the desert—all that sort of thing. She would have kept it up for a bit, and then gone back. But she got queerer and queerer. And there was the pilot. She—she took a fancy to him. He came here to see me, and she thought—Oh, well, you can understand. But he must have made it clear to her.

"And then she suddenly turned on me. She was awful, frightening. She said I should never go home again. She said I was in her power. She said I was a slave. Just that—a slave. She had the power of life and death over me."

Parker Pyne nodded. He saw the situation unfolding. Lady Esther slowly going over the edge of sanity, as others of her family had gone before her, and the frightened girl, ignorant and untraveled, believing everything that was said to her.

"But one day something in me seemed to snap. I stood up to her. I told her that if it came to it I was stronger than she was. I told her I'd throw her down onto the stones below. She was frightened, really frightened. I suppose she'd just thought me a worm.

"I took a step toward her—I don't know what she thought I meant to do. She moved backward; she—she stepped back off the edge!" Muriel King buried her face in her hands.

"And then?" Parker Pyne prompted gently.

"I lost my head. I thought they'd say I'd pushed her over. I thought nobody would listen to me. I thought I should be thrown into some awful prison out here."

Her lips worked. Parker Pyne saw clearly enough the unreasoning fear that had possessed her.

"And then it came to me—if it were I! I knew that there would be a new British consul who'd never seen either of us. The other one had died.

"I thought I could manage the servants. To them we were two mad Englishwomen. When one was dead, the other carried on. I gave them good presents of money and told them to send for the British consul. He came and I received him as Lady Esther. I had her ring on my finger. He was very nice and arranged everything. Nobody seemed to have the least suspicion."

Parker Pyne nodded thoughtfully. The prestige of a famous name. Lady Esther Carr might be mad as

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a hatter, but she was still Lady Esther Carr.

"And then afterward," continued Muriel, "I wished I hadn't. I saw that I'd been quite mad myself. I was condemned to stay on here playing a part. I didn't see how I could ever get away. If I confessed the truth now, it would look more than ever as though I'd murdered her. Oh, Mr. Pyne, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Do?" Parker Pyne rose to his feet as briskly as his figure allowed. "My dear child, you will come with me now to the British consul, who is a very amiable and kindly man. There will be certain unpleasant formalities to go through. I don't promise you that it will be all plain sailing, but you won't be hanged for murder. By the way, why was the breakfast tray found with the body?"

"I threw it over. I—I thought it would look more like me to have a tray there. Was it silly of me?"

"It was rather a clever touch," said Parker Pyne. "In fact, it was the one point which made me wonder if you might, perhaps, have done away with Lady Esther—that is, until I saw you. When I saw you, I knew that whatever else you might do in your life, you would never kill anyone."

"Because I haven't the nerve, you mean?"

"Your reflexes wouldn't work that way," said Parker Pyne, smiling. "Now, shall we go? There's an unpleasant job to be faced, but I'll see you through it, and then—home to Streatham Hill—it is Streatham Hill, isn't it? Yes, I thought so. I saw your face contract when I mentioned one particular bus number. Are you coming, my dear?"

Muriel King hung back. "They'll never believe me," she said nervously. "Her family and all. They wouldn't believe she could act the way she did."

"Leave it to me," said Parker Pyne. "I know something of the family history, you see. Come, child, don't go on playing the coward. Remember, there's a young man in Teheran sighing his heart out. We had better arrange that it is in his plane you fly to Baghdad."

The girl smiled and blushed. "I'm ready," she said simply. Then as she moved toward the door, she turned back. "You said you knew I was not Lady Esther Carr before you saw me. How could you possibly tell that?"

"Statistics," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

"Statistics?"

"Yes. Both Lord and Lady Micheldever had blue eyes. When the consul mentioned that their daughter had flashing *dark* eyes I knew there was something wrong. Brown-eyed people may produce a blue-eyed child, but it is less likely statistically the other way about."

"I think you're wonderful!" said Muriel King.

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Another in the grimly realistic series about Manuel Andradas, the Photographer, the paid assassin (although he preferred calling himself a "nullifier") of the Big Ones . . . in which the Photographer matches wits (but who can really match wits with Manuel Andradas?) with a "Professor in crime," a kind of modern-day Fagin, just before the wild, gay, careless three days and three nights of Carnival in Rio de Janeiro . . . Again we say: the Photographer is not a man to tangle with—not even to pose for . . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE PROFESSOR

by JAMES HOLDING

WHILE HE WAS STILL FIFTEEN feet away from the broken window, Manuel Andradas heard the Professor's didactic voice say quite clearly in English, "Hands up! Hands up!"

Whereupon a chorus of younger voices, held to a penetrating whisper, repeated after the Professor at once, "Ansup! Ansup!" in the unmistakable accent of Portuguese-speaking Cariocas struggling with unfamiliar English.

Manuel paused abruptly in his furtive approach to the abandoned tool shed that loomed ahead of him in the shadows of Rio's Botanical Garden. He balanced on the balls of his feet as immobile and soundless as a jaguar stalking a monkey. That simple English phrase mouthed by Brazilians in a dark shed of the deserted park brought Manuel's finely honed instinct for profit suddenly and electrically alive.

Closing his eyes for the space of a second, he imagined with all the vividness of reality his blunt-fingered hands fondling stacks of cruzeiros; his inner ear was instantly charmed by the fairy music of chinking coin; the nose of his fancy seemed to scent on the flower-fragrant air the cloying but ineluctable aroma of money.

Money! Next to his cameras and the photographic skill their use demanded of him, Manuel Andradas loved money best. His feeling for it was intensely emotional, yet sensitive and perceptive, too. In matters of money, Manuel liked to think, he had a sixth sense.

That's why he decided—immediately on hearing those words "Hands up!"—to postpone killing the Professor.

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Manuel had received this assignment yesterday from Rodolfo, who was his Rio contact with his employers, the Big Ones. They sat under a gay umbrella, he and Rodolfo, in a sidewalk café overlooking Gavea Beach.

Rodolfo, sipping inky *café-zinho* from a tiny cup, waved a hand at the wide strip of white sand that edged the ocean and said, "Gavea Mountain at one end, the peaks of the Two Brothers at the other. Less crowded than Copacabana, more scenic than Ipanema. Gavea Beach is my favorite, do you know that, Photographer?"

"I photographed it once," growled Manuel, "to illustrate an article in a North American magazine. I took magnificent photographs in color. They paid me less than the job was worth."

"Who has ever paid you as much as you think you deserve?" Rodolfo put down his coffee cup and lifted his long lips in an oily grin. "Even the Big Ones have failed to satisfy you, I seem to remember."

Somberly Manuel nodded. "They are niggardly. That is the only word for it. Clerk's wages for a craftsman like me—whose work is not only skilled but highly dangerous! Nullifying people is not as simple, may I point out, as repairing motors or typing letters in an office."

Rodolfo said impatiently, "You are tiresome on the subject. I have a new assignment for you. From the niggardly Big Ones. Do you want the money?"

"How much?"

"Half a million. No more. An unimportant person, I suppose."

"Life is important to all," Manuel said sententiously. "Only half a million cruzeiros for taking it away? With inflation, besides?"

"We won't bargain. Take it or leave it."

Manuel licked his lips. "Who?" he asked.

Rodolfo glanced around them. The next table on the café terrace was being claimed by a vociferous group of young men in bathing suits. "Later," Rodolfo said.

Manuel shrugged. "A local assignment, Rodolfo?"

"Yes."

"No traveling expenses then." Wistfulness touched Manuel's voice. He knew how to make a good thing of an expense account.

"No travel expenses," Rodolfo sneered. It was an effort for him to keep from shivering at the blank pitiless look in Manuel's muddy eyes. "And no pressing hurry, either, Photographer."

"What is the terminal date?"

"Anytime before Carnival begins. The sooner the better, of course."

Manuel nodded. "*Va bem.*" He gestured. "The beach?"

Rodolfo tipped his head in agreement, then paid for the drinks. They stood up, strolled across the road, walked down the shallow steps to the beach and waded

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through the sand toward the water's edge. When there was no sun-bather nearer than fifty yards, Rodolfo stooped over and wrote with one forefinger in the sand:

Professor Francisco Silvestre
St. John's School
Botafogo

Manuel, looking over his shoulder, committed the name and address to memory in the instant before a careless sweep of Rodolfo's hand erased the letters. "At least," said Manuel with mild relief, "it is not a woman this time."

They turned away from the water and walked casually down the beach, picking their way delicately among hundreds of bathers. Manuel's shoulder-slung camera case and flamboyant clothes made him look like a tourist. Rodolfo, of course, with his dark prognathous jaw, long arms and loose-jointed walk, would never look like anything but a prowling baboon, Manuel thought.

When the two men shook hands at parting a few minutes later, Rodolfo left a pad of banknotes in the Photographer's palm. "Half," he said. "Call me when the work is done, and I'll bring you the rest of your niggardly pay."

St. John's School, a huddle of ancient masonry buildings around a central athletic field in the heart of Botafogo suburb, was an expensive and prestigious private school for boys. Its small student body was composed for the most part of boys whose families possessed either distinguished lineage, or (preferably) excessive wealth, or (rarely) both.

Manuel Andradas knew something of the school. Several years before he had photographed for a sporting periodical the St. John's Soccer Team, unexpected winner of the Secondary School Soccer Championship of Brazil. So when he left Gavea, he drove at once to St. John's. It was four o'clock. Classes were over for the day. Three hundred boys ranging from nine to nineteen years of age were running, kicking, shouting, and laughing on the school athletic field. It was bedlam.

Manuel parked his car near the field. He took out his Leica and began to act quite convincingly like an amateur photographer who wished to record on film this after-school madhouse. He snapped several pictures from various angles, making great play with his light meter. Then he called to a ten-year-old in shorts and sweat shirt who was earnestly practicing ball control nearby while stealing curious glances at Manuel.

"Tell me, boy," said Manuel, "does Professor Silvestre still teach here?"

The lad took his soccer ball under his arm and politely came over to the fence. "Professor Silvestre? Yes, he is still here, Senhor. Why?"

"I am a former student of his,"

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Manuel explained. He saw the youngster's eyes widen as they noted his graying sideburns. "Many, many years ago," he hastened to add.

"Ah." The boy gave a brilliant smile. "Did you like the Professor, Senhor?" It was asked with a great air of innocent curiosity.

Manuel took a chance. "I liked him very much. I remember him with pleasure. I should like to see him again after all these years. Which dormitory does he live in, may I ask?"

"That one." The boy pointed. "He is prefect there. But Professor Silvestre is here on the field, Senhor, at this minute. He is assistant football coach as well as language instructor, you see. Over there." He pointed again.

Manuel, startled, looked where directed. "The tall skinny one with the long neck, eh?" he asked. "He has changed a great deal. I wouldn't have known him."

"Shall I get him for you, Senhor?" The boy seemed anxious to return to his play.

"No, thank you," Manuel said. He closed his camera deliberately. "I won't disturb him now." He switched the subject. "Are you on the school team?"

The boy laughed. "Not a chance! Maybe in a couple of years."

"Well, good luck," Manuel said. "Sorry I interrupted your practice."

"It was nothing." The boy returned to his play, his small sneakered feet flashing agilely as he shepherded the ball ahead of him.

At 10:20 that night Professor Francisco Silvestre's storklike figure emerged from his dormitory and set out on foot at a brisk pace westward. Manuel, who had been sitting patiently in his shabby old car for five hours a hundred feet away from the dormitory entrance, waited a full minute, then left his car and followed Silvestre quietly on the opposite side of the street. He easily kept the tall gangly Professor in sight.

The Professor's route skirted the northern border of landlocked Lake Freitas, then led toward the Jockey Club along the broad Rua Jardim Botanico. Manuel nodded to himself. He could not have asked for a safer or more convenient neighborhood in which to carry out his nullification of the Professor. The race track would be deserted tonight, the Botanical Garden across the way locked and lonely until opening time tomorrow.

Gradually he decreased the Professor's lead as they approached the great rectangle of fencing that contained the Botanical Garden. And it was well that he did so, for suddenly the Professor was no longer ahead of him. He had popped out of sight as unexpectedly as though he had stepped into an open manhole.

Manuel crossed the street. At the corner of the Garden he found a

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faint path leading back into the trees along the fence, at right angles to the street. This must be the way Silvestre had gone.

Manuel turned into the almost invisible footway. After some yards he found a gap in the steel fence. The Professor's curious route? Indubitably, Manuel thought, and squeezed through, then stood near a scatter of palm trees in the rear section of the Botanical Garden. He listened intently, but he heard no sound.

For several minutes he stood there motionless, just inside the fence, every sense alert, striving to pick up some clue to his quarry's whereabouts. At length his eyes grew accustomed to the pitchy darkness under the trees and he dimly made out the loom of a low building about a hundred feet away. Could the Professor have gone there? Not likely. It looked like an old ramshackle shed of some kind. But where else could Silvestre have gone? Manuel moved cautiously closer.

It was at that exact moment that he heard the Professor's voice say "Hands up!" And it was then that Manuel swiftly decided he would not kill Professor Silvestre that night.

Instead, he warily crouched beneath the broken window of the shed in dense shadow, and listened with lively interest to what went on within.

Four days later, during the after-luncheon study period at St. John's School, Professor Silvestre was called to the telephone. Manuel's voice said in his ear, "Professor Silvestre?"

"Yes?"

"I have a message for you."

"Who is this, please? *Come se chama?*"

"That is not important, Professor. My message is."

"What is the message, then?"

"It concerns an abandoned tool shed in the Botanical Garden," said Manuel. "And a professor who teaches English in the darkness."

There was a shocked silence that lasted a long time. Manuel did not interrupt it. At length the Professor whispered, "What?" in a stupefied tone.

"Meet me there tonight at eleven," Manuel said, and hung up abruptly.

He went early to the rendezvous to guard against the faint risk that the Professor might be cunning and try to set an ambush for the mysterious person who had telephoned him. But there was nothing of the sort. The Professor slipped through the gap in the fence alone just before eleven o'clock, and went unhesitatingly to the dark shed.

Manuel followed him silently, wrinkling his nose in distaste at the strong odor of fertilizer and rotted burlap that pervaded the old building.

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Silvestre whirled when he heard Manuel's step behind him. Manuel touched the button of his flashlight and pinned the Professor in its strong beam.

"Good evening," he said in a voice he tried to make soothing. "You are Professor Francisco Silvestre, are you not?"

The Professor, twitching with terror, seeking in vain to see who was behind the flashlight, said in a shaky voice, "Yes. And you? Who are you? And what is the message you threatened me with on the telephone?" His words came out in a rush.

Manuel laughed easily. "Sit down on that crate behind you, Professor," he suggested. "We have much to discuss."

The Professor groped behind him with one hand without moving his eyes. He located the crate by touch and gingerly sank down on it. Manuel remained standing. "I must apologize if my message startled you, Professor," he said, and paused. Then, "I have been commissioned, I am sorry to say, to kill you, sir."

The Professor clasped his hands together tightly and swallowed. His Adam's apple bobbed grotesquely in the torch's beam. "I don't understand," he stammered. "*Kill* me? Who commissioned you to kill me, for God's sake?"

"I received my commission from the Big Ones, the Corporation, Senhor. You have heard of them perhaps?"

"Vaguely, yes."

"Well, it is quite obvious that one of their clients wants you dead."

"But who?"

That puzzled Manuel too. He said, "Evidently someone got wind of your rather daring Carnival project, Professor, and paid the Big Ones to retain my services."

"So you're a hired assassin, Senhor? A killer for pay?"

"Only if, in my judgment, you are deserving of death," Manuel lied calmly. "I was directed to monitor your movements until Carnival time"—he smiled in the dark at the schoolmasterish word he had used—"and find out what you were up to. If it was anything truly criminal—anything that was likely to encourage delinquency in your students was the phrase, I believe—I was directed to nullify you forthwith."

Silvestre swallowed painfully again. "You mean you've been spying on me?"

"Playing detective," Manuel admitted blandly.

"Well, then, you know with certainty that I have not engaged in anything criminal!" The Professor spoke more boldly as his panic grew.

Manuel wagged the flashlight like an admonishing finger. "Come now, Professor, I am a better detective than that, I hope. I have sat outside that broken window behind you there every night for the past four nights, you know."

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Silvestre shied like a horse hearing a gadfly's buzz. The crate creaked. He gave denial another forlorn try. Speaking with difficulty he said, "If that were true, which it isn't, you would have learned nothing whatever to my disadvantage."

Manuel chuckled although his face in the shadow behind the flashlight beam did not change in the least. "Listen, Professor," he said. "I know it all—all about your charming Carnival project." He stood over the Professor and spoke without inflection, tossing his words into the Professor's lap like stones into a birdbath. "Let me enumerate. You have recruited from the slums of Rio fifteen teen-age delinquents. You have painstakingly trained them to speak a few words of English so that in the monumental confusion of Rio during Carnival they may mingle with the crowds and systematically rob North American women at the point of a gun. Their holdup vocabulary in English, taught them by you, consists of these phrases: 'Hands up! This is a real gun in your back, lady. Don't turn or move or I'll shoot. Give me your purse. And laugh.' "Manuel paused. "Am I right, Professor?"

The Professor was silent.

"Your gang of young bandits will rob only unaccompanied North American women—hopefully, the wealthy tourist widows who flock to Rio for Carnival. A woman's purse is instantly accessible; women are less likely to resist than men; a hissing voice in a woman's ear threatening death frightens her quickly into acquiescence.

"Your bandits will operate at random in widely scattered sections of the city during the three days and nights of Carnival. They will steal from their victims' purses not only cruzeiros but American dollars and Travelers Cheques as well. The boys will keep the cruzeiros, but they will bring the dollars and Travelers Cheques to you, their professor in crime. Have I missed anything?"

Still Silvestre did not speak. In the torch's beam his eyes were glassy, stunned.

Manuel went on calmly but relentlessly. "I know more. I know that last night, here in this shed at your last meeting with the boys before Carnival starts tomorrow, you issued each of your pupils a black sequinned Carnival mask, a toy wooden revolver of incredibly realistic appearance, and had one of your young ruffians demonstrate on your person exactly how the holdups should be executed.

"You also informed the boys exactly where you would be at various hours each day and evening of Carnival—so that after each robbery the boy could find you and turn in to you his haul of American dollars and Travelers Cheques, thus ridding himself not only of the loot in case of subsequent arrest but also of evidence against him.

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"During Carnival thousands of people will be in costume, including you, Professor; thousands will be tipsy; everyone will be gay and careless. A gang of masked boy bandits will blend into Carnival like salt into sand." Manuel shook his head admiringly. "It is a fine conception, Professor, a work of art. I salute you."

The Professor spoke at last. Hoarsely he flung out a final challenge. "If you know so much, Senhor, what will be my Carnival costume?"

"You'll be a kangaroo," Manuel answered promptly, "with a purple nose and an oversized pouch to hold Travelers Cheques."

Silvestre sighed. His hands stopped twitching and he resigned himself. "Kill me, then," he murmured with an attempt at dignity. "Why prolong this futile conversation?"

"I consider it far from futile," said Manuel. "Allow me." He turned off his flashlight and sat down on the crate beside the Professor. "As I said, I consider your plan a work of art. I wish to join you in it."

After a moment's incredulous pause Silvestre said, "What about the Big Ones?"

"They need only know that my investigation of you has proved fruitless. You are a model citizen, innocent of criminal proclivities. Therefore, no murder is indicated on my part. It is very simple."

The Professor turned to look at Manuel in the darkness that now almost tangibly filled the tool shed. It was a gesture of suddenly renewed hope.

"Fifty per cent of your take, merely," said Manuel softly, "will make me an ally instead of an enemy, Professor. Let the youngsters keep the share you promised them. But you and I will split your share half and half. Is it a deal?"

"Of course." Eagerness, vast relief were in the Professor's quick acceptance.

"Well, then," said Manuel, trying for a genial air of partnership. "There is only one serious problem remaining. Who, in addition to your bandit boys and us, could possibly suspect you of being a criminal? Who, I ask, retained the Big Ones to have you watched, and if necessary, killed?"

The Professor shrugged helplessly. "I have no idea."

Manuel said, "While I eavesdropped under that window these past nights, I gave the matter serious consideration. And it occurred to me that one of your ragamuffins seems better educated than the rest. He learned English more readily, spoke better Portuguese, asked the sharpest questions. A blond boy. The one who demonstrated holdup techniques on you last night. Here, I have his picture."

Manuel switched on the flashlight and held out a photographic

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print to the Professor, pretending to ignore the Professor's stifled gasp of dismay when he looked at it. The print showed in excellent detail a young blond boy holding a lethal-looking revolver in the Professor's back. It was a side view the camera had snapped; both the Professor's face and the boy's were plainly etched—the Professor's agitated, the boy's icy with simulated viciousness as he acted out the holdup with admirable realism.

"When," asked Silvestre in utter bewilderment, "did you take this picture? And how? It was pitch dark here last night when this demonstration took place."

Manuel said, "It was simple. I used infra-red film. With that I can take photographs in total darkness." He grinned without humor. "How did you think I knew about the toy guns? And that this boy was a blond?"

"That boy is Marco Alvenho," said Silvestre. "A likeable lad and something of a criminal genius, perhaps. The crime school, the gang of masked boy bandits was *his* idea, not mine. I embroidered it a little, naturally, by adding dollars and Travelers Cheques to the prospective spoils. Unlike the boys, I have the skill to convert the Cheques into cash, you see."

Manuel murmured, "Marco Alvenho, you say?"

"Yes. He recruited all my young guttersnipes for me. From Chicken and Kerosene Hills, from Leme, by mysterious means that he never confided to me. He's very keen, I assure you, Senhor."

Manuel nodded. "He must be." With studied calm he then asked the all-important question. "Who is he, this boy? A more talented guttersnipe than the others, obviously. Alvenho. I've never heard the name."

"Actually," said the Professor with a touch of pride, "he's in my Intermediate Language class at St. John's School. Comes from a very good family in Santos, I understand."

"Ah." Manuel let out his breath slowly. "Wealthy, you say?"

"I suppose so. Almost all St. John's boys have wealthy families." Then he saw what Manuel had seen already. "Is Marco's father, perhaps, the Big Ones' client? The man who hired them to hire *you* to kill me?"

"Who else could it be? One thing I know beyond doubt—it takes money to interest the Big Ones. Can you think of any other of your young thugs whose family would give even a centavo to save their son's soul or to take your life?"

Silvestre shook his head, his long neck twisting awkwardly.

"Our problem resolves itself, then. Marco's parents somehow get wind of you and your crime school. Probably from their son. They are shocked. They are more—they are terrified. Fearful for their young and so-far-blameless son. Fearful for

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their respectable name. They proceed to retain the Big Ones to clear the matter up at once. To kill you, Professor, if indicated, so that you cannot lead their dear delinquent son into criminal ways during Carnival. Doesn't that sound reasonable?"

"No," said the Professor. "Marco would never breathe a word to anybody about our plan. Especially to his parents. He's as close-mouthed as a mute, that boy. I know him."

"Nevertheless," said Manuel, "it can be no other way, I think. The boy's from Santos?" A nod. "When was he home last?"

"Christmas holidays."

"With his parents?"

Another nod, which Manuel felt rather than saw.

"And the plan for training your young thugs—had it yet been discussed at that time between you and Marco?"

The Professor was doubtful. Finally he said it was possible, but he couldn't remember. "But Marco didn't start recruiting the slum boys until last month," he added.

"Only the suggestion of a rumor would have been enough to alarm the parents."

"I tell you, Marco wouldn't let even a breath of a rumor escape him."

"How long did he remain at home?"

"Two weeks—a few days longer than the rest of our St. John's boys. He had some minor surgery to undergo, as I recollect."

"For what ailment?"

The Professor shrugged. "He limps a little. An attempt to correct it. Something about his Achilles tendon?"

"Minor surgery," mused Manuel. "With, let us say, some sodium pentathol as anesthetic. And his father present when he emerges from anesthesia, no doubt. One involuntary, pentathol-induced remark from the boy at that time would explain it all. At least," said Manuel, "to my satisfaction."

He arose and touched the flashlight button again. He extended a hand to the Professor, drew him to his feet. "May I have my infrared picture back, please?" he said, and took it from the other's lax fingers. "Let us go now, Professor. Cheer up, I beg you. We are allies. And will soon be rich, I hope. After the Carnival is over, I shall get in touch with you and collect my half share. Meanwhile, have no fear. I shall call off the Big Ones."

The Professor gave an ungainly bow and said, "Very well, Senhor. And please accept my humble thanks for—for sparing me. I *have* heard of the Big Ones before. And I confess to you that I considered myself a dead man."

Manuel bowed in return and pointed the flashlight beam toward the shed door. The Professor turned to follow it. As he did so, Manuel shot him twice in the back, just

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below the left shoulder blade, with a silencered gun.

The following day Manuel met Rodolfo by appointment in the Santos Dumont Airport Restaurant for lunch.

Manuel opened the conversation after they had ordered. "Any time before Carnival you said, Rodolfo. That was the contract. And today is the first day of Carnival."

He passed two snapshots across the luncheon table to Rodolfo. "The body may not be found for several days. But Professor Francisco Silvestre is dead—as you can see in those prints."

Rodolfo examined the snapshots under the edge of the table. One was a closeup of the two bullet-entrance punctures in the Professor's back, both ringed with singed cloth and bloodstains. The other showed the Professor's back and head, the head turned toward the camera, the cheek resting on a dirt floor, the eyes staring straight ahead with the disinterestedness that only death can manage. There could be no possible doubt that the man in the picture was dead, nor of how he had met his end.

Rodolfo said indifferently, "Very graphic, Photographer. These should convince our client nicely. It may take a few days, however, to secure the other half of your payment for you. Our client"—Rodolfo used the word like a finicky lawyer—"does not live in Rio, as it happens."

Manuel's face was blank. "I can wait," he said.

The waiter brought their food. For a time they ate in absorbed silence, Rodolfo's long loose lips occasionally giving forth, despite his best effort to prevent it, a wet, smacking sound which disgusted Manuel.

When Manuel put down his knife and fork he said quietly, "Nullifying Professor Silvestre was worth more than half a million."

"My heart bleeds for you," Rodolfo said.

"I want a full million for the job."

"Do you, indeed?"

"Yes. Could I get it if I were to make it possible for the Big Ones to increase *their* profit on the transaction?"

Rodolfo gave him a sharp look. "What are you saying?"

Manuel passed his infra-red picture to Rodolfo—the photograph that showed Marco Alvenho with a gun in the back of Professor Silvestre. "Have the Big Ones show *this* to their client," he said, "*after* they have shown him those two of the Professor dead."

Rodolfo stared at the picture, thunderstruck. "I thought *you* killed Silvestre, as agreed. This picture shows a boy killing him! Why, you fool, you won't even get your agreed price if our client sees this!"

"Just show him the picture," Manuel repeated. "He will give you almost any amount you care to ask for it. I myself want another

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half million merely, as I say. The Big Ones may keep anything above that they can pry out of this client."

Rodolfo said thoughtfully, "Why will our client pay through the nose for this picture?"

"Who cares? As long as he does?" Manuel handed Rodolfo a white envelope. "Here is the negative. He will insist on having that."

Rodolfo slid the envelope and pictures into his pocket. "If we can get a higher price than agreed upon with this picture of yours," he promised ungraciously at last, "you'll get your extra half million."

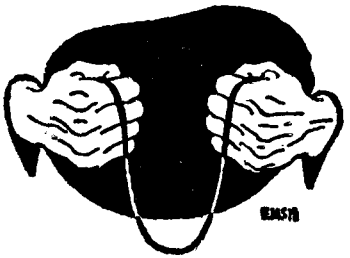
"*Muito obrigado*," said Manuel. "Thanks." He gazed out of the window beside him. Then, with unaccustomed animation, he said, "Carnival!"

Rodolfo sneered. "An amusement for children and fools," he said. "Don't tell me that *you* intend to participate in this drunken stupidity?"

"Why not? Man is meant occasionally to be gay."

Rodolfo snorted. Gaity was not in Manuel's character as Rodolfo had come to know it. Contemptuously he said, "You mean you will wear a costume and masquerade like all the other idiots?"

Manuel's lips curved. "Yes," he said slowly, savoring the words, "I am planning to attend Carnival as a kangaroo with a purple nose."



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The fourth in the new series about Cyriack Skinner Grey, modern scientific sleuth and EQMM's first wheelchair detective . . . about a particularly ugly crime and how the scientific sleuth dealt with it . . .

THE SCIENTIST AND THE OBSCENE CRIME

by ARTHUR PORGES

"MR. NEIL BURNETT HERE HAS A problem the police can't lick," Lieutenant Trask admitted unhappily. "We're trying, and officially I wouldn't call it defeat, but . . ." He shrugged.

The man in the wheelchair, where he was destined to spend the rest of his life, gave the detective a brief, wry smile, and then scrutinized the young man. He noted the haggard face, the greenish pouches under the dark eyes, and the quivering tenseness of his too-thin body.

"Relax, my boy," Grey said in his resonant voice, which usually had a soothing effect. A former research scientist of great brilliance and imagination, he still worked in a fine home laboratory financed from his valuable patents; but, in addition, he had become a crime consultant to Trask, an early pupil of his. "You won't help matters by coming apart. When did you last get a good night's sleep—or a square meal?"

"I can't remember," was the bitter reply. "Between Laura's trouble—that's the reason I'm here—and my work at medical school it's been rough. Only a year to go, and then suddenly this—this crazy, filthy business. And it's happening to us!"

Cyriack Skinner Grey was not only a scientist but a gentleman; he had a large bump of compassion, especially for the young. He took a shot-glass from a recess under the arm of his wheelchair, which was studded with gadgets of his own devising — mainly electronic — and from a tiny tap alongside drew a generous portion of amber liquid. He handed the drink to Neil Burnett.

"Try this," he said. "It will do you good."

The young man hesitated only for a few seconds, then gulped down the drink. He blinked, coughed, and a faint grin touched his lips.

"Wow!" he said. But clearly, some of the tension was gone.

"What's it all about," Grey asked, turning now to the Lieutenant.

"Obscene phone calls," Trask said tightly. "Some psychopath has been annoying Miss Nolan, Neil's fiancée. Horrible stuff. She's no prude, but there's a limit."

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"You must have a suspect. Usually the caller knows his victim, and may even have a known grudge."

"Better than that—it's more than a suspicion. Laura knows who's doing it; so do I; but proving it's another story. Just a voice over the phone. Undoubtedly it's Leo Fenton. He worked in the same office with her for a while, and pestered her for dates. She's engaged to Neil here, and naturally turned him down. She couldn't stand him anyhow; he made her skin crawl. Everybody knew before very long that he was sick. They had to bounce him out. Then these filthy calls began."

Grey gave Burnett an owlish stare.

"Since you know who's doing it, why not look him up and—ah—dissuade him? From the size of your shoulders I'd say you could throw a pretty good punch."

"Now, wait a minute—!" Trask objected, but Burnett cut in quickly.

"It's not that simple, as the Lieutenant was about to explain. Years ago it would have worked fine. But today, if you clout anybody, no matter what he does—even pushing your grandmother into a mudhole—it means going to court. I can't risk that now. I'm in my final year, with a good record and good prospects. A conviction for assault, or any bad publicity for the school, would ruin me. They wouldn't care a damn whose fault it was. There's an image to protect," he added in a dry voice.

"All right," Grey said. "I withdraw the suggestion. Why doesn't she leave her job—go where he can't find her?"

"She may have to," was the gloomy reply. "But Laura is private and personal secretary to the president of the company. It took five tough years for her to make it, and that was fast, but she's very bright. Frankly, we need the money. It will take me some time, even after I'm graduated and finish interning, to build up any kind of practice, and Laura's carrying the load. I can't do outside work and go to med school," he pointed out. "If she took another job, it would be a piddling one in comparison, and we need every cent to get along."

"What about screening her calls through another girl?"

"They tried that," the young man said. "Fenton's too sly, too clever. He can change his voice whenever he wants to—pretend to be somebody else, or some big shot's male secretary. So he manages to get through most of the time, and always talks dirty. Laura hangs up as fast as she can, but still it's no fun. He always ends with: 'Say something sweet, baby—I'm waiting.' And he does wait—you can hear him breathing. Then he gives a crazy, giggling laugh, and click! he's gone. Of course, she never gives him time to finish, but he can spew out a lot of obscenity in a hurry, and

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she's stunned—like a bird with a snake, she says."

"He calls from pay phones," Trask explained, "and never uses the same one twice. We've put tails on him, hoping to catch him in the act, and have him committed for psychiatric examination, but he's too smart. Always goes through department stores or busy supermarkets where a man—or even two—can't stay close to him. Then he scoots out through a side door. Following him from home has been a bust."

"So you see what we're up against," Neil said glumly. "We know who's doing it, and the police can pick him up almost any time at his apartment; but they say there's no case. Laura has a wonderful job, and has to take a lot of calls—that's one of her main functions: sweet-talking people too important to be brushed off, but not quite big enough for J.M., her boss, to bother with."

Grey looked thoughtful. He pressed a button on the arm of his wheelchair; a humidor slid out of a recess and swiveled into a handy position. The scientist selected a thin, very black cigar, and the humidor glided back out of sight. He touched something else, and a circular patch glowed red-hot on the other arm of the wheelchair. He held the cigar against it until fragrant blue smoke arose, then put the cigar to his lips.

"Get any tapes?" he asked Trask.

"Several."

"Anybody try to match them against Fenton's voice?"

"Yes, the crime lab had a go at it, but the results weren't conclusive. The squiggles were similar, but it seems a psychopath isn't consistent even in his speech patterns or wave lengths or whatever's involved. A good lawyer—hell, even a punk one—would murder the D.A. in court. Besides, let's face it: the D.A. doesn't think the case is very important compared with the murders, hit and runs, and assaults we're getting."

"If we could only squirt some dye down the phone wire," Burnett said, with a weak grin; the liquor was acting on his empty stomach, Grey inferred, feeling a pang of guilt. "All over Fenton's big flabby face—that might prove he was the one, even to the dumbest jury."

"Mark him with gentian violet, hey?" the scientist said. "Pity it's not a voice tube; you'd have the solution. A definite label . . . hmm."

"It's pretty hopeless," Burnett said. "We're just wasting your time, I'm afraid. But the Lieutenant said that if anybody could find a solution, you could."

"Trask overrates me," Grey said a little sharply. "I've bungled more than once. However, give me a chance to think about it. I have the vague glimmering of the ghost of an idea—it's that tenuous. Let me have your phone number, and the one at Laura's office." He touched another button; a clipboard slid out like magic, and he pulled a

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sheet of paper off the top. "Write on that."

When Neil had done so, Grey squinted at the writing, and said dryly, "You should be a good doctor—your scribble is almost indecipherable! Now get some sleep. Trask or I will let you know if anything useful occurs to us."

When Trask and Burnett had left, the old man settled down in his wheelchair, puffing at the black cigar. He was trying to lure some unformed idea from the fringes of his consciousness to where he could grasp it. He was intrigued by Neil's quip about pouring dye down the phone wire; it seemed related somehow to the solution he was seeking.

Three days later Burnett, Trask, and two other detectives converged on the main switchboard outside of Laura's office. With them was Grey's assistant and legman—his impish, red-haired 14-year-old son with an I.Q. of 180 and the good sense not to take it too seriously. After Grey had matured some theoretical ideas about a case, it was usually up to Edgar to implement them, under Trask's questioning eyes.

Ordinarily, Laura would have been inside, at her desk, which guarded the boss's door; but Grey preferred to have the call intercepted at the main board; so she had been "demoted" for the day and was holding down a job that had preceded her rise in the firm.

There was no telling when Fenton would call, but of late he tended to pick early afternoons. In any case, they had no choice but to sweat it out.

"Remember," Trask told Laura, "you're to wait until he says 'Say something sweet, baby'—then hand Edgar the headset in a hurry." He looked at one of his men. "Is Fenton's apartment staked out?"

"Yes, sir. If he comes back there from the pay phone, he'll be grabbed. Think he will?"

"I don't see why not," the Lieutenant said. "Unless he knows what Grey is up to—which is more than I do," he complained, giving Edgar a reproachful glance.

Luckily, they didn't have to wait long. At 2:18 Laura answered a call, and they saw her stiffen, first flushing deeply, then becoming very pale. Burnett swore, his hands tightening into fists, as he noted her expression of revulsion.

Edgar stood near her; in his hand was a cylindrical object with a flared mouth. It was the size of a small water glass, and two bare copper wires projected from the base. Somehow word had spread to other offices, and a crowd had collected. Even the president came out of his lordly isolation; he was like a sheepdog hustled by an unruly flock.

Laura suddenly slipped the headset off and passed it to Edgar. He took it, placed the flared end of his tubular metal device against the mouthpiece, and deftly made the two copper wires touch.

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There was a startlingly loud detonation, so sharp and whiplike that it caused the spectators' ears to ring, even though they were ten yards away.

"Dad concentrated on those frequencies best carried by the phone," Edgar said airily. "It has a pretty limited range, you know, but we hit Fenton mighty hard in the middle of it. Dad doesn't think his eardrum will break, but he should be deaf in one ear for several hours. If you pick him up, and have the police surgeon test his hearing—with witnesses—you should have a case that will satisfy the D.A."

"We're on our way." Trask was smiling grimly, and his eyes were no longer questioning.

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ADVENTURES OF THE PUZZLE CLUB

. . . in which Ellery is invited to join one of the most exclusive clubs in the world—The Puzzle Club—and is challenged to solve the unsolvable.

THE LITTLE SPY

by ELLERY QUEEN

THE LETTER WAS WRITTEN IN A SE-cretive hand on paper as thick as a pharaoh's papyrus. Instead of a name or a crest, its engraved monogram consisted of one large, gold, ticklesome question mark.

"My dear Mr. Queen," Ellery read. "It is the pleasure of The Puzzle Club to invite you to our next regular meeting, which takes place at 7:30 P.M. Wednesday at the address below. Purpose: to offer you our membership test, which we believe without modesty will challenge your logical powers.

"Ours is a very small, congenial group. There are no dues or other obligations. You will be the only outsider present. Informal dress.

"We hope you will respond affirmatively."

None of Ellery's reference books, including the telephone directory, listed a Puzzle Club. On the other hand, the signature and address made it unlikely that this was the gambit to a mugging party or badger game. So Ellery dashed off an acceptance note; and Wednesday evening found him, at 7:30 to the tick, pushing the bell of a penthouse foyer in the nobbiest reaches of Park Avenue.

The lordly Englishman who opened the door turned out to be a butler, who took his hat and vanished; and the rumpled-looking Texan giant who greeted him was unmistakably Ellery's correspondent and host. The big man's name was Syres, and he was one of the ten wealthiest men in the United States.

"On the dot," Syres boomed. "Welcome, Mr. Queen!" He was all but grinding his muscular hands; and he rushed Ellery into a museum of massive Western furniture, studded leather, burnished woods, antique carpets, old masters, and twinkling crystal and copper. "I see you're admiring my traditionalism. I loathe contemporary anything." Except, Ellery thought, contemporary oil wells and the profits therefrom; but he meekly followed his

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host into a living room vast enough for a hidalgo's rancho.

In a moment Ellery was shaking hands with the other members of The Puzzle Club. Three were present besides Syres, and not altogether to his surprise Ellery recognized each of them. The dark, tall, mustache-eyebrowed man was the celebrated criminal lawyer, Darnell, who was being mentioned frequently these days for the next opening on the Supreme Court. The trim, short, peach-cheeked one was the noted psychiatrist, Dr. Vreeland. The third was Emmy Wandermere, the poet, a wisp of a woman with shocking blue eyes and the handclasp of a man.

Ellery gathered that The Puzzle Club was of recent origin. It had no more purpose than any other association in gamesmanship, perhaps less; and while its members were all prominently implicated in the world as it was, the Club's bylaws, he was promptly told, forbade discussion at its monthly meetings of any subject not connected with puzzles. As the psychiatric Dr. Vreeland put it, "Other people meet regularly to play bridge. We meet to mystify each other—as man has done with riddles since prehistory—in a sort of ritual adoration of the question mark."

They sat him down in a roomy armchair near the man-high fireplace, and the English butler brought him a Scotch, a napkin, and a little tray of sizzling canapés.

"And that's all you get, Mr. Queen, until the test is over," the oil man explained. "We don't eat dinner until afterward."

"The Arabs have a proverb," said Dr. Vreeland. "When the stomach speaks, wisdom is silent."

"Or as Stevenson put it," murmured Miss Wandermere, "the sort who eat unduly must never hope for glory."

"You see, Queen, we want you to be at your best," said Darnell the lawyer, staring piercingly at their victim. "Our membership rules are quite harsh. For example, application is by unanimous invitation only. Our fifth member, Dr. Arkavy, the Nobel Prize-winning biochemist, who's away at a science conference, voted by cable all the way from Moscow to invite you."

"You should understand, too," said Tycoon Syres, "that if you fail to solve the puzzle we're going to throw at you tonight, you'll never be invited to try again."

"Harsh, indeed," said Ellery, nodding. "You titillate me. How exactly is the puzzle propounded?"

"In story form," said the lady poet. "How else?"

"Have I the option of asking questions?"

"As many as you like," said the little psychiatrist.

"In that case," Ellery said, "you-all may fire when ready."

"It happened during World War II," the multimillionaire host began

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the story. "You'll remember how hectic everything was—government departments mushrooming overnight, new bureaus scrambling to get organized, all sorts of people pulled out of the woodwork to help with the war effort, and security officers going crazy with the work load suddenly dumped on their shoulders."

"In a certain very important government war-bureau newly set up," psychiatrist Vreeland said as he lit a cigar, "one of the working force taken on was a little man named Tarleton, J. Aubrey Tarleton, who came out of retirement to do his bit for Uncle Sam. J. Aubrey was an ex-civil servant with a good if undistinguished record in government service. The bureau was an essential and very sensitive one. There was no time to do more than a conventional security check, but Tarleton's long record seemed to speak for itself."

"If you had seen old Mr. Tarleton," Miss Wandermere, the poet, took up the tale, "he would have struck you as a throwback—say, someone out of the British civil service in Rudyard Kipling's day. He had a Colonel Blimp mustache, he invariably dressed in ultra-conservative clothes of Edwardian cut, he actually wore a piped vest and spats, carried a silver-headed cane, and he was never without a boutonnière pinned to his lapel, usually a white gardenia. A spic-and-span, courtly little old gentleman out of a long-dead age.

"His tastes were as elegantly old-fashioned," the lady poet went on, "as his manners. For instance, Mr. Tarleton was something of a gourmet and a connoisseur of vintages. Also, he would talk endlessly about his hobby, which was painting tiny landscapes on little ovals of ivory and ceramic—even worse, going on and on about his collection of Eighteenth Century miniatures by Richard Cosway and Ozias Humphry and other artists practically no one had ever heard of. In short, he was a good deal of a bore, and the younger people in the bureau especially vied with one another inventing new ways of avoiding him."

"Then something happened," Lawyer Darnell chimed in, "that threw the spotlight on little Mr. Tarleton. It was shortly before D-Day, and the dapper old gent suddenly wangled a priority airline passage to London. And just then Intelligence received an anonymous tip that Tarleton was in the pay of the Nazis—that he was a German spy. There were thousands of such tips during the war, most of them checking out as baseless, the result of malice, or spy fever, or what-have-you. But in view of Tarleton's access to top-secret material, and rather than take a chance at such a critical time, they yanked old Tarleton off the plane just as it was about to take off, and they gave him a going-over."

"This," asserted oil man Syres gravely, "was the most thorough

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search in the long and honorable history of spy-catching. It took a very long time, because at first it was entirely unsuccessful. In the end, of course, they found it."

"The plans for the Allied invasion of Europe, no doubt," Ellery said, smiling.

"Exactly," said Miss Wandermere, looking faintly disapproving. "The date cycle for D-Day, the location of the landings, the strength of the Allied forces—everything the German high command needed to smash the invasion in its tracks. There it was, to the last detail, all written down in plain uncoded English.

"The question you've got to answer, Mr. Queen, is a simple one. But watch out! Where did the Intelligence people find the spy-message?"

"Or to put it the other way," Darnell, the criminal lawyer, said, "where did Tarleton conceal the spy-message?"

"May I rule out the plane?" Ellery asked promptly. "That is, he didn't conceal it somewhere on board just before he was grabbed? Or in his luggage, or someone else's luggage?"

"He did not."

"He didn't pass it to a confederate?"

"No."

"The message was found on his person?"

"It was."

"Well, let's see." Ellery frowned. "I assume the obvious places of possible concealment yielded nothing—hat, coats, vest, trousers, shirt, tie, shoes, socks, spats, underclothing, galoshes or rubbers, that sort of thing?" There was a general nod. "The flower in his buttonhole? It was a real flower?"

"Nature's own," said Dr. Vreeland.

"The contents of his pockets?"

"Every object he carried in his pockets was minutely gone over, without result."

"The pockets themselves?"

"Concealed nothing."

"A secret pocket? Anywhere in his clothing?"

"No."

"Was he carrying a book?"

"No."

"A newspaper? Magazine? Directory? Any printed material whatever?"

"None."

"There must have been some printed matter in his wallet—credit cards, driver's license—"

"All carefully examined," Syres chuckled, "including, I might add, the material of the wallet itself—for secret writing. And no dice."

"Was his bare skin examined for secret writing?"

"It was, including his scalp, ears, and finger- and toenails," the oil man grinned, "and there wasn't any. They looked under infra-red and ultra-violet and every other kind of light known to science. They peered at every square inch

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through a microscope. They used every chemical known to bring out secret writing. They even parboiled him—applied heat."

"Thorough," said Ellery dryly. "Well." He reflected. "Was he tattooed with some design that looked innocuous but actually concealed a hidden message?"

"In the naked state," Miss Wandermere assured him, "old Mr. Tarleton was as pinkly unmarred as a six-month foetus."

"And I take it the usual fluoroscope and X-ray examinations were made without turning the message up in the old spy's interior?"

"You take it correctly, Mr. Queen."

"His mustache!" Ellery said. "Under it."

"Ingenious mind, this fellow," Lawyer Darnell said admiringly. "You mean Tarleton wrote the message on his upper lip and then grew a mustache over it? Well, Intelligence thought of that. They shaved off his mustache and found nothing underneath but lip."

"Interesting." Ellery was pulling on his nose, a sure sign of deep cerebration. "Let's tackle objects that might conceal the message. If I hit one that's relevant, stop me . . . Watch, wrist or pocket type? Ring? Hearing aid? Hair-piece? Glass eye? Contact lenses? The shafts of eyeglasses? False teeth? False finger or toe? Any prosthetic device at all?"

"Heavens, you'll have the old traitor made up of bits and pieces, Mr. Queen," laughed the lady poet. "No to all your suggestions."

"Keyring? Card case? Cufflinks? Tie clasp? Belt? Suspenders? Pipe? Tobacco pouch? Cigarettes? Cigarette case? Snuff box? Pill box?" Ellery went on and on, until he ran out of ideas. To each suggestion they shook their heads.

There was silence. The members of The Puzzle Club glanced at one another significantly.

"Buttons," Ellery said, of a sudden. "Hollowed-out buttons! No? . . . Ah, I've forgotten something!"

"What's that?" asked Darnell curiously.

"His silver-headed cane!"

But they all shook their heads, smiling. And there was silence again.

"Well, I've eliminated everything you've told me about the old boy, and lots more. Or have I?"

"To that question, Mr. Queen," said Syres, smiling even more broadly, "you'll have to provide your own answer. Fascinating problem, isn't it?"

"And damned smart Intelligence people," Ellery mourned. "Final question: What if there's more than one answer, and I hit one you haven't thought of?"

There was incredulous hilarity.

"In that case," the lady poet said, "we'd probably elect you president of the Club."

"Now, Mr. Queen," said Syres, "you may retire to my study to

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think, or take a walk down Park Avenue, or spend your time any way you please while chewing on the puzzle. Unfortunately, we can't let you have more than an hour. My chef Charlot's dinner won't be edible after nine o'clock. Which is your pleasure?"

"Inasmuch as all this ratiocination has made me hungry," Ellery said, grinning back, "I think I'll answer your puzzle right now."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER
Can you qualify for membership in The Puzzle Club?

"The clue," Ellery chuckled in the attentive silence, "stemmed from old Tarleton's hobby—his painting of miniatures. It naturally suggested that he had written the spy message in miniature—in lettering so small it could be read only through a strong magnifying glass. That much was obvious.

"The question, of course, was: On which object Tarleton carried on his person was the miniaturized spy message inscribed?

"I just questioned whether I had covered everything about the old spy that you people had mentioned in your description of him. Of course I had not. I eliminated every possible object on Tarleton's person *but one*. The message must therefore have been written in miniature on that one object.

"Old Tarleton was in the tradition of the very select few who have been able to inscribe the Gettysburg Address or the Lord's Prayer on an object no bigger than an oversized period.

"He wrote the spy message on the head of the pin that secured his flower to his lapel."

"Miss Wandermere and gentlemen," said the tycoon heartily, "I give you the newest member of The Puzzle Club!"

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Aarons, Edward S.	ASSIGNMENT—CONG HAI KILL	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	7/28
Armstrong, Charlotte	THE WITCH'S HOUSE	Crest	.60	8/11
Atlee, Philip	THE IRISH BEAUTY CONTRACT	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	7/28
Ford, Leslie	RENO RENDEZVOUS	Popular Library	.60	8/2
Porter, Joyce	DOVER ONE	Crest	.50	8/11
Queen, Ellery	WHY SO DEAD?	Popular Library (Orig.)	.60	8/2
Van Thal, Herbert	THE PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	7/28

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Two "*Detective-Crime Discoveries*" *from* SHAKESPEARE

In January 1966 we received an exciting, and to us, an extraordinary letter from Anne Janet Braude of Berkeley, California. The letter read:

Dear Ellery Queen:

I have just finished reading Dr. Banesh Hoffman's *Sherlock, Shakespeare, and the Bomb* in the February 1966 issue of *EQMM*. As a detective-story addict, I want to thank you for a brilliant and thoroughly delectable tour de force. But as a graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. in English literature, I am moved to lodge a protest, in behalf of the Bard, against a trend which this story exemplifies.

The greatness of Shakespeare is naturally an irresistible lure to any mystery writer with literary interests, and the bait may be taken in two ways. One is to invent a crime involving a Shakespeare folio, manuscript, or autograph—e.g., Vincent Starrett's *The Unique Hamlet;* Lillian de la Torre's *The Missing Shakespeare Ms.;* Ernest Bramah's *The Ingenious Mind of Mr. Rigby Lacksome;* Carolyn Wells's *The Shakespeare Title-Page Mystery;* Gerald Kersh's *The Thief Who Played Dead;* your own *My Queer Dean* and (Barnaby Ross's) DRURY LANE'S LAST CASE—and so many others over the years, including Edmund Crispin's LOVE LIES BLEEDING in which a copy of LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON is energetically pursued.

The second method matches the wits of the protagonist, or the author, against Shakespeare's. This class includes Dr. Hoffman's story as well as all the attempts, serious or frivolous, to dispute the authorship of the plays, especially those attempts involving cryptographic methods.

Now this is all good clean fun, but what I object to is the implied assumption that the modern author—or scholar—can so easily outwit on his own ground the greatest literary genius our language has produced. In support of my objection let me call to your attention a point which seems to have escaped scholars and sleuths alike—that the "classic" detective short story was invented by William Shakespeare nearly 400 years ago—more than 250 years *before* Poe!

Ignorance of this fact is perhaps forgivable in light of the circumstances that the story in question appears in one of the least familiar plays, HENRY VI, PART II. It is inserted in Act II, Scene I,

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of this play (lines 59-160), and is based on an episode in Grafton's CHRONICLE which in turn derives from a story in Sir Thomas More's DIALOGUE OF THE WORSHIP OF IMAGES. The detective story begins with the stage direction: *Enter Townsman of St. Albans crying,* a miracle!—and it concludes with Gloucester's speech: Let them be whipped . . . from whence they came.

The incident of the pretended miracle of St. Albans—or perhaps we may call it *The Adventure of the Simpcox Miracle*—anticipates the modern detective story in several respects. First and most basically, the reader is given all the clues necessary to solve the mystery himself—the First Principle of Poe-try. Next, the detective, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (the real hero of the play), has a "Watson" in the person of King Henry, the naive observer who perceives the necessary clues (Why then, thou know'st what colour jet is of?), yet fails to make the proper deductions, since he lacks Gloucester's Dupinian powers of ratiocination. Note also that Henry, like "Watson," is a great one for moralizing. In addition, it may be tenuously suggested that the nature of the crime—the faking of a miraculous cure—gives the story a religious cast which anticipates G. K. Chesterton. Finally, the episode is uniquely Shakespearean in its poetry and wit, even including a moderately famous quotation, though it is one not dignified by inclusion in Bartlett's: Have you not beadles in your town, and things called whips?

It is of course a familiar observation that Shakespeare created, in plays like OTHELLO and MACBETH, masterpieces of psychological crime fiction. But I believe that his "invention" of the tale of pure deduction springs from a root other than the mature considerations of human nature that produced the great tragedies. It is the youthful Shakespeare's delight in sheer wit, revealed also in the dazzling assaults on language that he perpetrated in ROMEO AND JULIET, and in the mind-stunning plot complications of THE COMEDY OF ERRORS. The Simpcox Miracle is an intellectual puzzle, meant to delight the mind rather than to tear the heart; any sympathy we feel is for the criminals (Alas sir, we did it for pure need) and is not shared by the "detective." But even in a "trifle" tossed off in 101 lines, Shakespeare outstrips most of his successors who devote themselves seriously to the task.

Sincerely, Anne Janet Braude

The three parts of HENRY VI were written early in Shakespeare's career, probably between 1588 and 1592. All three parts are relatively

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unknown, both to readers and playgoers. James Sandoe has written that "the HENRY VI trilogy is nearly *terra incognita* for playgoers, for they have only rare chances to see it. And, in spite of some bustle among scholars . . . one may still emerge from a course 'on Shakespeare' without meeting these three plays at all."

And now we give you a Sixteenth Century "detective story"—with further editorial comment after you have read this "'trifle' tossed off in 101 lines" . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SIMPCOX MIRACLE

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Enter Townsman of St. Albans crying, a miracle!

GLOUCESTER

What means this noise?
Fellow? what miracle dost thou proclaim?

TOWNSMAN

A miracle, a miracle!

SUFFOLK

Come to the King, and tell him what miracle.

TOWNSMAN

Forsooth, a blind man at Saint Alban's shrine,
Within this half-hour, hath received his sight,
A man that ne'er saw in his life before.

HENRY

Now God be praised, that to believing souls
Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair.

Enter Mayor of St. Albans and his brethren, Simpcox borne in a chair, his Wife, and Townsmen.

BEAUFORT

Here comes the townsmen on procession,
To present your Highness with the man.

HENRY

Great is his comfort in this earthly vale,
Although by his sight his sin be multiplied.

GLOUCESTER

Stand by, my masters. Bring him near the King,

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His Highness' pleasure is to talk with him.

HENRY

Good fellow, tell us here the circumstances,
That we for thee may glorify the Lord.
What, hast thou been long blind, and now restored?

SIMPCOX

Born blind, an't please your Grace.

WIFE

Ay indeed was he.

SUFFOLK

What woman is this?

WIFE

His wife, an't like your worship.

GLOUCESTER

Hadst thou been his mother, thou couldst have better told.

HENRY

Where wert thou born?

SIMPCOX

At Berwick in the North, an't like your Grace.

HENRY

Poor soul, God's goodness hath been great to thee.
Let never day nor night unhallowed pass,
But still remember what the Lord hath done.

MARGARET

Tell me, good fellow, camest thou here by chance,
Or of devotion to this holy shrine?

SIMPCOX

God knows, of pure devotion, being called
A hundred times and oftener, in my sleep,
By good Saint Alban, who said, Simpcox, come;
Come offer at my shrine, and I will help thee.

WIFE

Most true, forsooth; and many time and oft
Myself have heard a voice to call him so.

BEAUFORT

What, art thou lame?

SIMPCOX

Ay, God Almighty help me.

SUFFOLK

How cam'st thou so?

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SIMPCOX
A fall off a tree.
WIFE
A plum tree, master.
GLOUCESTER
How long hast thou been blind?
SIMPCOX
O born so, master.
GLOUCESTER
What, and wouldst climb a tree?
SIMPCOX
But that in all my life, when I was a youth.
WIFE
Too true, and bought his climbing very dear.
GLOUCESTER
Mass, thou lov'dst plums well, that wouldst venture so.
SIMPCOX
Alas, good master, my wife desired some damsons,
And made me climb, with danger of my life.
GLOUCESTER
A subtle knave but yet it shall not serve.
Let me see thine eyes; wink now, now open them.
In my opinion yet thou seest not well.
SIMPCOX
Yes master, clear as day, I thank God and Saint Alban.
GLOUCESTER
Say'st thou me so? What colour is this cloak of?
SIMPCOX
Red, master, red as blood.
GLOUCESTER
Why that's well said. What colour is my gown of?
SIMPCOX
Black forsooth, coal-black as jet.
HENRY
Why then, thou know'st what colour jet is of?
SUFFOLK
And yet I think, jet did he never see.
GLOUCESTER
But cloaks and gowns, before this day, a many.
WIFE
Never before this day, in all his life.

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GLOUCESTER
Tell me sirrah, what's my name?

SIMPCOX
Alas master, I know not.

GLOUCESTER
What's his name?

SIMPCOX
I know not.

GLOUCESTER
Nor his?

SIMPCOX
No indeed, master.

GLOUCESTER
What's thine own name?

SIMPCOX
Saunder Simpcox, an if it please you, master.

GLOUCESTER
Then, Saunder, sit there, the lyingest knave in Christendom. If thou hadst been born blind, thou mightst as well have known all our names as thus to name the several colours we do wear. Sight may distinguish of colours, but suddenly to nominate them all, it is impossible. My lords, Saint Alban here hath done a miracle; and would ye not think his cunning to be great that could restore this cripple to his legs again?

SIMPCOX
O master, that you could!

GLOUCESTER
My masters of Saint Albans, have you not beadles in your town, and things called whips?

MAYOR
Yes, my lord, if it please your Grace.

GLOUCESTER
Then send for one presently.

MAYOR
Sirrah, go fetch the beadle hither straight.

[*Exit Townsman.*

GLOUCESTER
Now fetch me a stool hither by and by. [*A stool brought out.*] Now sirrah, if you mean to save yourself from whipping, leap me over this stool and run away.

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SIMPCOX

Alas master, I am not able to stand alone.
You go about to torture me in vain.

Enter Beadle with whips.

GLOUCESTER

Well sir, we must have you find your legs. Sirrah beadle, whip him till he leap over that same stool.

BEADLE

I will, my lord. Come on sirrah, off with your doublet quickly.

SIMPCOX

Alas master, what shall I do? I am not able to stand.

[*After the Beadle hath hit him once, he leaps over the stool and runs away; and Townsmen follow and cry,* a miracle!

HENRY

O God, seest thou this, and bearest so long?

MARGARET

It made me laugh to see the villain run.

GLOUCESTER

Follow the knave, and take this drab away.

WIFE

Alas sir, we did it for pure need.

GLOUCESTER

Let them be whipped through every market town, till they come to Berwick, from whence they came.

EDITORS' NOTE: Shall we replace Edgar Allan Poe, as Patron Saint of detective-story writers, with Shakespeare? Should Mystery Writers of America award not an "Edgar" but a "William"? No, not quite. Edgar A. Poe is still the Father of the Detective Story, as we know the genre and think of it today. The 101 lines from Shakespeare's HENRY VI, PART II, belong to the "incunables"—the short-story forerunners that include the Ancient Hebrew (Wisdom of Solomon, and from the Apocryphal Scriptures, the "detective" feats of Daniel), the Ancient Greek (Herodotus), the Latin (Cicero and Virgil), the Medieval (GESTA ROMANORUM, Juan Manuel, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Murner), the Elizabethan (William Painter in addition to William Shakespeare), the Seventeenth Century (Sancho Panza episodes from de Cervantes), and the Eighteenth Century (ARABIAN NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS, Chevalier De Mailly, and Voltaire's ZADIG).

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But while we shall not rush to enthrone Shakespeare as the "inventor" of the "classic" detective short story, we are vastly grateful to Anne Janet Braude for her "discovery" and for giving *EQMM* this opportunity to publish a passage from the work of, as Miss Braude so correctly describes him, "the greatest literary genius our language has produced"—the greatest in our language or in any other . . .

But may we go Miss Braude one step further on the road of "discovery"? In HENRY VI, PART II, Act II, Scene V, Shakespeare dabbles in another species of the genre, the "crime story"—two murders, this time in a mere 67 lines. Of course, murder is an older "fine art" than detection, and therefore the theme was more prevalent in earlier periods of literature, especially in the Sixteenth Century; but this particular "crime story" by Shakespeare is also virtually unknown, so we offer it to you as the second part of a pair of "detective-crime" discoveries . . .

Alarum. Enter a Son that hath killed his father, bringing in the dead body.

SON

Ill blows the wind that profits nobody.
This man, whom hand to hand I slew in fight,
May be possessed with some store of crowns,
And I that haply take them from him now,
May yet ere night yield both my life and them
To some man else, as this dead man doth me.
Who's this? O God! It is my father's face,
Whom in this conflict I unwares have killed.
O heavy times, begetting such events!
From London by the King was I pressed forth,
My father, being the Earl of Warwick's man,
Came on the part of York, pressed by his master;
And I, who at his hands received my life,
Have by my hands of life bereaved him.
Pardon me God, I know not what I did;
And pardon father, for I knew not thee.
My tears shall wipe away these bloody marks;
And no more words, till they have flowed their fill.

HENRY

O piteous spectacle! O bloody times!
Whiles lions war, and battle for their dens.
Poor harmless lambs abide their enmity.

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Weep wretched man; I'll aid thee tear for tear.
And let our hearts and eyes, like civil war,
Be blind with tears, and break o'ercharged with grief.

Enter a Father, bearing his son.

FATHER

Thou that so stoutly hath resisted me,
Give me thy gold, if thou hast any gold;
For I have bought it with an hundred blows.
But let me see. Is this our foeman's face?
Ah, no, no, no, it is mine only son.
Ah boy, if any life be left in thee,
Throw up thine eye. See, see what showers arise,
Blown with the windy tempest of my heart,
Upon thy wounds, that kills mine eye and heart.
O pity, God, this miserable age!
What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly,
Erroneous, mutinous, and unnatural,
This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!
O boy, thy father gave thee life too soon,
And hath bereft thee of thy life too late.

HENRY

Woe above woe! Grief, more than common grief!
O that my death would stay these ruthful deeds!
O pity, pity, gentle heaven pity!
The red rose and the white are on his face,
The fatal colours of our striving houses.
The one his purple blood right well resembles,
The other his pale cheeks, methinks, presenteth.
Wither one rose, and let the other flourish.
If you contend, a thousand lives must wither.

SON

How will my mother for a father's death
Take on with me, and ne'er be satisfied!

FATHER

How will my wife for slaughter of my son
Shed seas of tears, and ne'er be satisfied!

HENRY

How will the country for these woful chances
Misthink the King, and not be satisfied!

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SON

Was ever son so rued a father's death?

FATHER

Was ever father so bemoaned his son?

HENRY

Was ever King so grieved for subjects' woe?
Much is your sorrow; mine, ten times so much.

SON

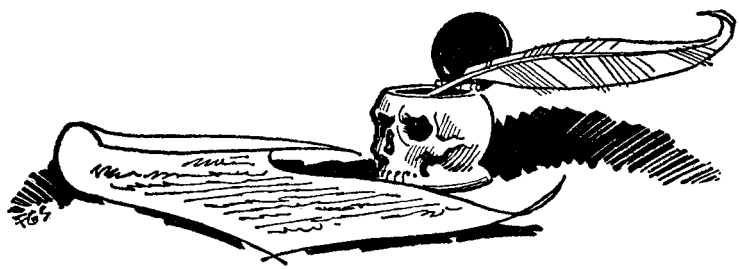
I'll bear thee hence, where I may weep my fill.

[*Exit with the body.*

FATHER

These arms of mine shall by thy winding-sheet.
My heart, sweet boy, shall by thy sepulchre,
For from my heart thine image ne'er shall go.
My sighing breast shall be thy funeral bell;
And so obsequious will thy father be,
Meet for the loss of thee, having no more,
As Priam was for all his valiant sons.
I'll bear thee hence, and let them fight that will,
For I have murdered where I should not kill.

[*Exit with the body.*



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Is it possible to change the future? To prevent a murder you know will happen? Even with the help of a time machine that tells you the place, the approximate time the murder will occur, the identity of the victim, and the identity of the murderer? Interesting questions . . .

DEPARTMENT OF FUTURE CRIME

by LLOYD BIGGLE, Jr.

A BRIGHT SUNNY DAY IN MAY, AND A new job for me. I found the room in the basement of police headquarters—a big room, with freshly stenciled letters D. F. C. on the door, and an unholy conglomeration of tubes, wires, and dials bulking large in one corner.

A bright young police cadet sat at a desk in the center of the room. "You're Jim Forsdon?" he said. "The Old Man wants to see you."

I nodded, and dumped my stuff into an empty locker.

The Old Man had his office in a cubbyhole off the main room. It was quite a comedown from the quarters he'd occupied upstairs as Chief of Detectives. He'd held onto that job past his retirement age, and then they were about to throw him out on his ear when D. F. C. came along, and he jumped at it. The Old Man was not the retiring type.

His door was open, and he motioned me in. "Sit down, Forsdon," he said. "Welcome to the Department of Future Crime."

I sat down, and he looked me over. A lean, hard face, closely cropped white hair, and steely gray eyes that looked through a man, rather than at him. Small—five feet seven, 140 pounds. You looked at him and wondered how he'd ever got on the force in the first place, until you saw his eyes. I'd never felt comfortable in his presence.

"Do you know what we have here, Forsdon?" he said.

"Not exactly."

"I don't either—exactly. The big boys upstairs think it's an expensive toy. It's up to us to make it important."

I nodded, and waited for him to go on. He packed his pipe, lit it, then leaned back and let it go out.

"We have an invention," he said, "which I don't pretend to understand. You saw the thing?"

"Yes," I said. It wasn't easy to overlook.

"Walker calls it Cronus—for the Greek God of Time. It gives us random glances around the city on what looks like a large TV screen—random glances into the future!"

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He paused for dramatic effect, and I probably disappointed him. I already knew that much.

"The picture is hazy," he went on, "and sometimes we have a hell of a time figuring out the location of whatever it is we're looking at. We also have trouble pinpointing the time of an event. But we can't deny the potential. We've been in operation for three weeks, and already we've caught half a dozen holdups before they've happened."

"At least it's an ideal we've always worked for," I offered. "I mean, to prevent crime, rather than just catch the criminal."

"Ah!" he said, and went to work on his pipe again. "Maybe I didn't make myself clear. We caught half a dozen holdups on that screen, but we didn't prevent a single one. All we managed to do was catch the criminal within a few minutes of the time he committed the crime. It raises an interesting question. Is it possible to change the future?"

"Why not?" I said.

"Maybe you can find out. It isn't too critical, where the holdups are concerned. The criminal is caught immediately, the loot is recovered, and the victim goes his way thinking kind thoughts about the efficiency of the police force. But what about murder? Apprehending the criminal ten minutes later won't be much comfort to the victim . . . Well, now that we have our own full-time detective—well, we'll see what you can do. I want to introduce you to Walker. And Cronus!"

Walker—Dr. Howard F. Walker—was hunched over his creation. There was no doubt about it being his baby, as you could see from the way his hands caressed the dials. He was a gangling-looking man, six feet one, maybe 170 pounds, 40 years old. He had a long neck, an overly pronounced Adam's apple, and thinning hair. He wore thick glasses, his face was gentle and dignified, and he looked like a very tired university professor.

He didn't hear us come up, and the Old Man waited quietly until he noticed us.

"Walker," the Old Man said, "this is Forsdon, our new detective."

He hardly looked at me. "Cronus has something," he said. "If I can only find it again—"

He turned to his dials.

"That's one of our problems," the Old Man said. "Once we focus on a crime, it's sometimes hard to locate it again. The time interval between the present and the time the crime is committed naturally keeps getting less. It takes a different adjustment each time."

His voice trailed away, and I looked from Walker to the six-foot-square screen above his head. Shadows flitted about on the screen. A female shadow walking along the street holding a child shadow by the hand. Shadow aircars moving along jerkily. A row of male shadows grotesquely posed along a bar, their glasses making bright blotches in

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the picture. A room, and a female shadow moving around a table.

Walker bent forward tensely, sweat streaking his face, as he made delicate adjustments.

The scene kept shifting. A park with trees and lounging adults and running children. A room with people seated around a table—a reading room, perhaps at the public library. A comfortable-looking living room with an old-fashioned fireplace and a bright blotch that was the fire. A bedroom and a female shadow dressing—or maybe undressing. And mind you, Cronus wasn't a plaything for a Peeping Tom. The shadows were so shadowy that only their clothing gave them sex.

"That's it!" Walker said suddenly. He moved a motion picture camera into position and pressed a button. It whirred softly as we watched.

A nondescript living room. A female shadow opened the door and came quickly into the room. She threw up her hands and stood transfixed for a horrible moment or two. A male shadow bounded into the picture—a giant male shadow. She turned to run, and he caught her from behind. His hand moved upward. Something glittered in it, and he brought it down. He struck twice, and the female crumpled to the floor. He whirled, ran toward us, and disappeared from the screen. The camera ground on, recording the image of that shapeless shadow on the floor.

Abruptly the scene changed. A restaurant with crowded tables and jerkily moving robot-servers. Walker swore softly, and turned off the camera.

"That's all I got before," he said. "If I could come on it from a different angle, maybe we could locate the place."

"When?" the Old Man said.

"Seven to twelve days."

It hit me, then, like a solid wallop on the jaw. I'd been looking into the future.

"Plenty of time," the Old Man said. "But not much to go on." He turned to me. "What do you think?"

"Might be able to identify the man," I said. "He'll be well over six foot—wouldn't surprise me if he were six eight or nine. He'll have the build of a male gorilla. And he limps slightly with his right foot."

"Not bad. Anything else?"

"It's an apartment or a hotel room," I said. "The number flashed on the door when the woman opened it, but I couldn't make it out. I'd guess an apartment. The scanner screen by the door means it's either relatively new, or it's been remodeled. The living room has a corner location, with windows on two adjoining sides. It's hard to say for certain, but I believe there's an old-fashioned sofa —one of those with a back on it—along the far wall."

Walker slumped into a chair. "You make me feel better," he said. "I thought there was next to noth-

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ing to go on. But I saw it twice. How did you—"

"Now you know why I asked for Forsdon," the Old Man said, and I made noises intended to indicate modesty. "You only missed one thing."

"What's that?"

"Our assailant is left-handed. And remember—the limp may be something temporary. All right, Forsdon, it's all yours. Seven to twelve days, and you'd better plan on seven."

He went back to his office, and I looked at Walker. "Can you give me any idea at all as to the location?"

"I can draw you a circle on the map, but it's only about fifty-fifty that you'll find the place inside the circle."

"That's better than nothing."

"There is one thing," Walker said. "I'd like you to wear this. Everywhere."

A band of elastic with what looked like dark beads placed on it at intervals.

"It's an arm band," Walker said. "Cronus picks up these beads as bright spots. So I'll be able to identify you if you show up on the screen."

I hesitated, and he said, "The Old Man wears one. We know it works, because Cronus has picked him up twice."

I took the arm band, and slipped it on.

I sat down with a map and a directory and worked until a technician came back with the developed film. Walker was still perspiring in front of Cronus. He hadn't been able to focus on the crime a third time. The Old Man's door was closed, but his nasal voice could be heard bellowing into his telephone. I pulled the curtains to darken one corner of the room and fed the film into a projection machine.

I ran the film ten times without coming up with anything new. I couldn't decide whether the assailant was a chance prowler or someone known to the victim. No facial expressions. I stopped the camera and made a sketch of the room from what I could make out in the way of furnishings.

The Old Man came barging out of his office, took a quick look at my sketch, and nodded approval. "We'll find the apartment," he said. "The sooner the better, I suppose. And then our troubles will really start."

I couldn't see that, and I told him so. I figured our troubles would be nearly over if we found the apartment.

"You think it's possible to prevent this crime," he said. "I don't. Even if we find the apartment and identify the man and woman, the crime is still going to happen."

"Why?" I said.

"Look at it this way. If we prevent the crime, it's not going to happen. Right?"

"Right."

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"And if it's not going to happen, Cronus wouldn't show it to us. All you see on that screen is what *will* happen. As far as Cronus is concerned, it already has happened. Preventing it is like trying to change the past."

"We can try," I said.

"We have a solemn duty to try. I have three teams of detectives to help you. They're waiting outside. Tell them what you want them to do."

I wanted an apartment living room with a corner location and a door scanner. It wasn't as bad as it sounded—the scanner was a new gadget at that time. Not many apartment buildings would have it. There was always the chance, of course, that an individual had had one installed on his own, but that was a worry I could postpone.

I put in a hectic day trudging through apartment buildings and squabbling with superintendents, and I found it the next morning—in a stubby little seven-story building on South Central. It was one of those apartment houses that went up way back when the city decided it couldn't afford the luxury of open spaces, and opened part of old Central Park to apartment buildings. This one was a midget among the other buildings in that development, but it had been remodeled recently. It was equipped with scanner screens.

After the usual protests the superintendent showed me around. Most of the occupants weren't home. He let me into a rear apartment on the sixth floor, and I took one look around and caught my breath.

I pulled out my sketch, though I had it memorized by this time, then moved across the room to get the right angle. The sofa was there—it *was* an old-fashioned job with a back. What had been a bright blotch in the picture turned out to be a mirror. A blur by the sofa was a low table. A chair was in the wrong place, but that could have been moved. What was I thinking about? It was *going* to be moved. Every detail checked.

"Stella Emerson," the superintendent said. "*Miss* Stella Emerson—I think. She never gave me no trouble. Something wrong?"

"Not a thing," I said. "I want some information from her."

"I dunno when she's home."

Her next-door neighbor did. I went back to headquarters and picked up the loose ends on the attempt to identify our assailant-to-be. No luck. But at six o'clock that evening I was having a cup of coffee with Miss Stella Emerson.

She was the sort of person it's always a pleasure to interview. Alert, understanding, cooperative—none of that petty, temperamental business about invasion of privacy. She was no young chick, either—26 or 27, maybe five feet four, 110 pounds. The pounds were well dis-

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tributed, and she was darned nice-looking.

She served the coffee on the low table by the sofa and sat back with her cup in her hand.

"You wanted information?" she said.

I fingered my own cup, but I didn't lift it. "I'd like to have you think carefully," I said, "and see if you've ever known a man who matches this description. He's big, really big. Heavy-set. Maybe six feet eight or nine. He's left-handed. He might walk with a slight limp in his right foot."

She set her cup down with a bang. "Why, that sounds like Mike—Mike Gregory. I haven't seen him for years. Not since—"

I took a deep breath, and wrote *Mike Gregory* in my notebook.

"Where was he when you saw him last?"

"On Mars. I was there for two years with Civil Service. Mike was a sort of general handyman around the Administration Building."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"As far as I know, he's still on Mars."

"I'd like to know everything you can tell me about this Mike Gregory," I said. "May I take you to dinner?"

As my dad used to say, there's nothing like mixing business with pleasure.

She suggested the place—a strange little restaurant in the basement of a nearby apartment house. There were lighted candles on the tables—I hadn't seen one in years. The waitresses wore odd costumes with handkerchiefs wrapped around their heads. An old man sat off in one corner scraping on a violin. It was almost weird.

But the food was good, and Stella Emerson was good company. Unfortunately, her mind was on Mike Gregory.

"Is Mike in trouble?" she said. "He always seemed like such a gentle, considerate person."

I thought of the knife-wielding shadow. "How well did you know him?"

"Not too well—he stopped to talk with me now and then. I never saw him except at work."

"Was he—well, interested in you?"

She blushed. I've never been a social reformer, and I've more or less accepted things the way they are—women included. I've heard it said that the blush went out when women did away with their two-piece bathing suits and started wearing trunks like the men. I'm telling you, you can't have any idea about what's wrong with our scientific civilization until you've seen a girl blush by candlelight.

"I suppose he was," she said. "He kept asking me to go places with him. I felt sorry for him—he seemed such a grotesque person—but I didn't encourage him."

"You're certain about the limp?"

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"Oh, yes. It was very noticable."

"And about his being left-handed?"

She thought for a moment. "No. I'm not certain about that. He could have been, I suppose, but I don't think I ever noticed."

"Is there anything else you remember about him?"

She shook her head slowly. "Not much, I'm afraid. He was just a person who came through the office now and then. He had an unusual way of talking. He spoke very slowly, separated his words—just . . . like . . . this. Most of the girls laughed at him, and when they did he'd turn around and walk away without saying anything. And—oh, yes, sometimes he'd talk about California. I guess that was where he was from. I never found out anything about his personal life."

"But you didn't laugh at him?"

"No. I couldn't laugh at him. He was just too—pathetic."

"Have you heard from him since you came back?"

"He sent me a Christmas card once. He didn't know my address on Earth, so he sent it to the office on Mars so it would be forwarded. It didn't reach me until July!"

"Last July?"

"No, it must have been four years ago—two years after I left Mars."

I dropped Mike Gregory and tried to learn something about Stella Emerson.

She was 28. She'd worked for three years on Mars, then she came back and got a job as private secretary with a small firm manufacturing plastic textiles. She made enough money for her own needs and was even able to save a little. She liked having a place of her own. She had a sister in Boston, and an aunt in Newark, and they visited her occasionally. She led a quiet life, with books and visits to the art institutes. Her only hobby was photography.

It all sounded wonderful to me. The quiet life. A detective gets enough excitement on the job. If he can't relax at home, he's going to be a blight on the mortality tables.

We were on our second cup of coffee by then and I motioned the old fiddler over to our table.

"Miss Emerson is a very pretty girl, don't you think?" I said.

His bloodshot eyes peered out over a two-week growth of beard, and he said. "Yup. Shore is."

I slipped him a dollar bill. "How about giving us a melody that's just as pretty as Miss Emerson."

He gave her a clumsy serenade. She reacted just as I'd hoped she would. She blushed furiously, and kept right on blushing, and I just leaned back and enjoyed it.

I took her back to her apartment and said a friendly farewell at her door. We shook hands—yes, actually shook hands. In this day and age! And she didn't invite me to

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spend the night with her, which was just as refreshing.

I rode the elevator with chiming bells in my head and a wisp of the old man's music floating through my mind. I stepped out on the ground level, walked dreamily out the door, and hailed an aircab with my pocket signal.

And just as I was about to step into the aircab, it stabbed me like the flickering knife on Cronus's screen. In seven to twelve days—no, nearer five to ten days now—she was going to be murdered!

"Something wrong?" the driver said.

I flashed my credentials. "Police Headquarters," I said. "Use the emergency altitude."

Walker was crouched in front of Cronus, perspiring as usual, and looking infinitely more tired. No matter what time I came in, he always seemed to be there, or else there was a note saying he was down in his lab in the subbasement.

"I haven't found it again," he said.

"That's all right. We can manage with what we have."

He frowned irritably. "It's important, confound it. This is just an experimental model, and it's maddeningly inefficient. With money and research facilities we could produce one that would really work, but we can't get that kind of support by predicting a few piddling holdups. But a murder, now—that would make someone sit up and take notice."

"Stop worrying about your blasted Cronus," I snapped. "I don't give a damn about that pile of junk. There's a girl's life to be saved."

It was unfair, but he didn't become offended. "Yes, of course," he said. "The girl's life—but if I can't get more information—"

"I've found the apartment," I told him, "and I've found the girl. But the man is supposed to be on Mars. It doesn't figure, but it's something to work on."

I called the Old Man and gave him my report. If he resented my bothering him at home he didn't show it. I started turning every wheel I could get my fingers on, and then I went home. I won't pretend that I slept.

By morning we had a complete report from the Colonial Administration on Michael Rolland Gregory. Fingerprints, photos, detailed description, complete with limp and left-handedness. The works. Also, the added information that he'd resigned his civil service job eight months before and had left immediately for Earth, on a Dawn Liner scheduled to land at San Francisco.

I swore savagely, got off an urgent message to San Francisco, and left for a dinner date with Stella Emerson. And another handshake at her apartment door.

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San Francisco did a thorough job, but it took time—two more days. Michael Rolland Gregory had hung around for a while, living in rundown rooming houses and holding a series of odd jobs. He had disappeared two months ago.

"He could be anywhere by now," I told the Old Man.

"Including here in New York," the Old Man said dryly.

Two to seven days.

I took Stella back to her apartment after our dinner date, and in front of the door I ignored her hand. "Stella," I said, "I want you to know I like you a lot."

She blushed wonderfully. "I like you too, Jim."

"I'd like to ask you a favor—a very special favor."

Her blush deepened, with a hint of panic. "I'd like to, Jim. Because I—like you. But I can't. It's hard to explain, but I've always told myself that unless I marry a man—"

I leaned against the wall and laughed helplessly while her eyes widened in amazement. Then I dispensed with the handshaking. She clung to me, and it might have been her first kiss.

"I don't just like you, darling," I said. "I love you. And that wasn't the favor I was going to ask. You said you have an aunt living in Newark. I want you to stay with her for a while—for a week or so."

"But why?"

"Will you trust me? I can't tell you anything except that you're in danger here."

"You mean—from Mike?"

"I'm afraid so."

"It's hard to believe that Mike would want to harm me. But if you think it's important—"

"I do. Will you call your aunt, now, and make the arrangements? I'll take you over tonight."

She packed some things, and I took her to Newark in an aircab. Her aunt was hospitable and cooperative, albeit a little confused. I checked the apartment thoroughly. I was taking no chances that the aunt's living room could be the potential scene of the crime. It wasn't—no similarity at all.

"Promise me," I said, "that you won't go back to your own apartment for any reason until I tell you it's all right."

"I promise. But I may need some more things."

"Make a list, and I'll have a police woman pick them up for you."

"All right."

I made her give me her key. I wasn't taking any chances on her making just one quick visit to her apartment and running into that date she was supposed to have with the future.

I arranged with the superintendent of her apartment house to have the lights in her apartment turned on each evening, and turned off at an appropriate time. I put a stakeout on her apartment building, also on her aunt's. I got a detective as-

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signed to shadow her, though she didn't know it, of course.

Then it was zero to five days, and I was quietly going nuts.

Zero to four days.

I walked into the D. F. C. room, and Walker swarmed all over me. "I found it again," he said.

"Anything new?"

"No. Just the same thing—exactly the same."

"When?"

"Two to three days."

I sat down wearily, and stared at Cronus. The screen was blank. "How did you manage to invent that thing?" I said.

"I didn't really invent it. I discovered it. I was tinkering with a TV set, and I changed some circuits and added a lot of gadgets, just experimenting. The pictures I got were poor, but they didn't seem to be coming from any known station —or combination of stations, since they kept changing. That was interesting, so I kept working on it. Then one day the screen showed me a big aircar smashup. There were about ten units involved, and I told myself, 'Boy, these Class D pictures are really overdoing it.' About a week later I opened my morning paper—and there was the same smashup on page one. It took a long time to get anybody interested."

He stopped suddenly as the Old Man came charging out of his office. "Brooklyn," the Old Man called. "Gregory was living in a rooming house in Brooklyn. He left three weeks ago."

A lead with a dead end. No one knew where he'd gone. It proved that he was somewhere in the vicinity of New York City, but I don't think any of us had ever doubted that.

"One thing is interesting," the Old Man said. "He's using his own name. No reason why he shouldn't, of course—he's not a criminal. But he's a potential criminal, and *he doesn't know that.*"

I saw, suddenly, that we had a double problem. We had to protect Stella from Gregory, but we also had to protect Gregory from himself. If we could find him.

"There's not much we can do," I said, "but keep on looking."

It was what Walker called the Critical Period. Something had to happen on this day or the next, or Cronus was a lost cause.

"If we could only pick Gregory up and hold him for a couple of days, maybe we could beat this," I told the Old Man. "We've protected Stella Emerson, we've locked up her apartment, and caging Gregory should close the case."

He laughed sarcastically. "You think that would solve the problem? Listen. We once spotted a holdup, and I recognized the crook. He had a long record. I had him picked up, and he was carrying a gun, so we slapped him in

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jail on a concealed weapons charge. He escaped, got another gun, and committed the holdup right on schedule. I'm telling you, Cronus shows exactly how the future is. We can't change it. I'm working as hard as anyone else to prevent this, but I know for a certainty that sometime today or tomorrow the girl and Gregory are going to meet in that apartment—or in one exactly like it."

"We're going to change the future this time," I said.

On my way out I stopped for a good look at Cronus. Nothing but a monster would give you a murderer, a victim, the place, and the approximate time, then make you completely helpless to do anything about it. I felt like giving Cronus a firm kick in a vital part of its anatomy.

I called off my dinner date with Stella and prowled around Manhattan looking for a big man with a pronounced limp. One speck of dust among millions. I noticed with satisfaction that I was not alone in my search. Aircars were swooping in low for a quick look at pedestrians. Foot patrolmen were scrutinizing every passerby. Detectives were making the rounds of rooming houses and hotels with photographs. Cab and bus drivers were on the alert.

For a man who had no reason to hide, Michael Rolland Gregory was doing an expert job of keeping out of sight.

I radioed police headquarters at 10:00 P.M., and the Old Man's voice exploded at me. "Where the hell have you been? The stakeout at the girl's apartment nabbed Gregory. They're bringing him in."

I cut off without any of the formalities, and sprinted. I tore down the corridor to the D. F. C. room and burst in on what might have been a funeral celebration. Walker sat with his face in his hands and the Old Man was pacing in a tight circle.

"He got away," the Old Man snarled. "Snapped the handcuffs like toothpicks, bowled over his escort, and ran. The man must have the strength of a utility robot."

"How did they happen to pick him up?" I said.

"He came strolling down the street and started to go into the apartment building. Completely innocent about the whole thing, of course. He didn't have any idea we were looking for him."

"He has now," I said. "It's going to be great sport locating him again."

The Old Man already had a small army loose in the area where Gregory escaped, but for all they found he might have become invisible. I called Stella and asked her to stay home from work the next day. I doubled the stakeout on her aunt's apartment.

I was up at dawn, prowling the streets, riding in patroling aircars, and I suppose generally making a

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nuisance of myself with calls to headquarters. We put in a miserable day, and Gregory might have been hiding on Mars for all the luck we had.

I had my evening meal at a little sandwich shop, and did a leisurely foot patrol along the street in front of Stella's apartment building. The stakeout was on the job, and the superintendent had Stella's lights on. I stood for a moment in the doorway, watching the few pedestrians, and then I signaled an aircab.

"I'd like to circle around here a bit," I said.

"Sure thing," the driver said.

We crisscrossed back and forth above the streets, and I squinted at pedestrians and watched the thin traffic pattern. Fifteen minutes later we were back in front of the apartment buildiing.

"Circle low around the building," I said.

"Oh, no! Want me to lose my license? I can't go out of the air lanes."

"You can this time," I said. "Police."

He looked at my credentials, and grunted. "Why didn't you say so?"

There was a narrow strip of lawn behind the building, with a couple of trees, and then a dimly lit alley. The cabbie handed me a pair of binoculars, and I strained my eyes at the sprawling shadows. I couldn't see anything suspicious, but I decided it might be worth a trip on foot.

The third time around I glanced at Stella's lighted windows—the rear ones—and gasped. A dark shadow clung to the side of the building, edging slowly along the ledge toward her window. Gregory.

"See that?" I said to the cab driver.

As we watched, Gregory got the window open and disappeared into the apartment.

I tried to radio the men on the stakeout, and couldn't rouse them. I called headquarters.

"Forsdon," the girl purred. "Urgent message for you."

"Skip it," I said. I snapped out a description of the situation, and cut off.

"Can you get close enough to get me through that window?" I asked the driver.

"I can try," he said. "But watch your step, fellow. It's a long drop."

He hovered close, and I grabbed the edge of the window and pulled myself through. Gregory faced me across the living room, a bewildered, panicky look on his large child-like face. I was thinking, How stupid can we get? From the way he came into Cronus's picture we should have known he didn't come through the door. Stella had come through the door, and we just assumed he was already in the room. But who would have thought that a man of Gregory's

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size could make like a human fly?

"All right, Gregory," I said. "You're under arrest."

Tears streaked his face. His jaw moved, but no sound came out. Suddenly I saw how we had blundered. This grotesquely oversized child meant no harm to anyone. Stella was the only person he'd ever known who treated him like a human being, and he wanted to see her again. For some reason he couldn't understand, the police were trying to prevent that. Suddenly the entire universe was against him, even Stella, and he was frightened.

And dangerous. He lunged at me like a piledriver, and forced me back toward the open window. I got my gun out, and he just casually knocked it out of my hand. He had me on the window ledge, forcing me out, when the apartment door opened.

It was Stella.

"Run!" I shouted.

Then the night air was whistling past me, and from the window above came Stella's long piercing scream. I crashed into the branches of a tree, struggled frantically for a hold, and fell through.

The doctor had a face like an owl as he bent over me, making funny clucking noises with his tongue. "There we are," he said when he saw my eyes open. "Not bad at all."

"What's good about it?" I said.

"Young man, you fell six stories, and all you have is a broken leg and assorted bruises. You ask me what's good about it?"

"You wouldn't understand," I said.

Stella's scream still rang in my ears. I twisted, and felt the heavy cast on my left leg. My mood merged with the dull gray of the hospital room.

A nurse came tiptoeing in and smiled blandly when she saw I was awake. "You have some visitors," she said. "Do you want to see them?"

I knew it was the Old Man. I hated to face him, but I said, "Let's get it over with."

The Old Man loomed in the doorway, backed away, and came in again. And ahead of him walked Stella.

A different Stella—face pale and distorted, eyes registered shock and grief. But alive—very much alive.

I started to get up and the nurse placed a firm hand on each shoulder and held me down. The Old Man moved up a chair for Stella.

"Jim," she said. Her voice broke.

"I'll tell him," the Old Man said. "It seems that Miss Emerson has a sister living in Boston."

"I know that," I said.

"A *twin* sister. The girl didn't know anything about our problem, and she came down this evening for a visit. She had a key to Miss Emerson's apartment, and she

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walked in just at the right time to play a leading role in Cronus' drama."

"Was she—"

"No. Thankfully, no. Her wounds are painful, but superficial. She'll be all right."

I relaxed. "What happened to Gregory?"

"He tried to go out the way he came in. And there wasn't any tree to break his fall. And one other thing. I have an urgent message for you from Walker."

I glanced at the slip of paper. "Jim, for God's sake, stay out of aircars!"

"Cronus showed us your fall half an hour before it happened. From our angle it looked as if you fell out of the aircab. Some time in the next twenty-four hours, Walker calculated, but we couldn't reach you. Why don't you leave that damned radio on?"

"It wouldn't have made any difference," I said. "You know yourself that—"

"Yes," he said. "I know. Cronus can show us the future, but he can't change it—and neither can we."

"He changed mine," I said, looking at Stella.

The Old Man took the hint, and left.

Five minutes later the phone rang and I reached around Stella to answer it. It was Walker, and Stella held her face close to mine and listened.

"Just called to offer my congratulations," Walker said.

"Congratulations for what?"

"For your wedding. Cronus just picked it up."

I swore, but I kept it under my breath. "I haven't even asked the girl yet," I said, "and don't tell me I'm wearing that stupid arm band at my wedding, because I'm not going to."

"No, but you're on crutches. And the Old Man is there and he's wearing his."

"All right," I said. "When is this happy event going to take place?"

"Four to eight days."

I slammed down the receiver and kissed Stella's blushing face. "Cronus says we're getting married in four to eight days, and this is one time that monstrosity's going to be wrong: We'll get married tomorrow."

"All right, Jim, if you want to. But—"

"But what?"

"This is May twenty-eighth, and if we get married tomorrow I won't be a June bride."

We were married five days later, and we went to Arizona on our honeymoon. I'd done some checking, and I knew Arizona was well outside of Cronus' range.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLES HOFFMAN**

TITLE: ***The Body of the Crime***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: San Diego, California, and environs

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It started innocently—just enough to put the obnoxious Clancy Eggers out of commission. But then the week-end fishing trip became an unexpected nightmare.*

I DON'T REMEMBER WHOSE IDEA IT was to knock Clancy Eggers out with an overdose of barbiturates—it may even have been mine; but certainly it wasn't greeted with any lack of enthusiasm. Though it was no prank, either.

The four of us had had our fill of Clancy ever since we boarded the cruiser at its mooring in San Diego early that afternoon. Sober, Clancy was a great guy and a good friend of ours; drunk—and Clancy had been well oiled almost from the time we'd left Los Angeles earlier that morning, thanks to the jug of Bloody Marys we'd ill-advisedly brought along in the car—drunk, Clancy was loud-mouthed, obstreperous, opinionated, and completely insensitive to anything or anyone but Clancy Eggers.

So, by the time he'd fallen off the dock twice, turned the dinghy over in the bay, lost the keys to the car (and lost the car, or at least couldn't remember where he'd parked it after the rest of us did the unloading), insulted the people whose cruiser was docked next to ours, and started a fight in a liquor store which ended with his being tossed out on a six-pack of beer and two bottles of bourbon—by that time we decided something had to be done about Clancy Eggers. Before the entire deep-sea fishing week-end was ruined.

A dose of barbiturates seemed to be the answer. Not enough to kill Clancy, you understand—in spite of our mounting annoyance with him none of us intended to murder him; but enough to put him out for

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a good long night while our tempers subsided and we regrouped our forces.

The cruiser was called The Idyll and such, with company other than Clancy's, it might have been. A beautiful little 32-foot cabin cruiser moored at Shelter Island in San Diego's harbor. Mark Brady owned The Idyll, and was our host. Mark is an insurance broker in Los Angeles, a jovial Irishman with a quick twinkle and a quicker temper, the latter usually kept under control. Except in the case of Clancy Eggers.

Mark's 28-year-old son, Kevin, was another member of the group. Kevin, a level-headed and clean-cut young man, is an architect in Beverly Hills. Pete Rust was the fourth member of the team. You probably have heard of Pete. Ten years ago he was an important leading man in motion pictures. Pete is in his mid-forties, handsome, well educated (for an actor), a good drinker, a good fisherman, and altogether a good guy.

I was the fifth of the group.

And though I don't remember whose idea it was to bomb out Clancy, I do remember the prompt and mutual assent.

"This calls for something drastic," Kevin suggested. "Like leaving him behind, maybe."

It was late in the afternoon at this point and Clancy Eggers had wandered up the dock to pass the time of day with whatever unsuspecting soul might swim into his bleary orbit. So we four conspirators were alone in The Idyll's cabin—the trim cruiser shipshape and fueled, tackle rigged, the live-bait tank functioning, and everything set for an early morning assault on the fishing waters 30 miles out at sea.

But Clancy would be wandering back, that was for sure. And the hardest thing in the world to lose is a drunk who doesn't want to get lost.

"I don't think we can work that —leave him behind, I mean," Mark said. "Besides, it's *his* car—keys or no keys. We have to get home some way."

"How about eighty-sixing him?" was another suggestion.

Which we didn't buy, either. If we took all the alcohol west of the Rockies away from Clancy forevermore, his current load would keep his personal and private elephants pink for some time to come.

"Then how about a mickey? Knock him out?"

"With his cast-iron constitution?"

"If we had some sleeping pills—"

As I say, I'm not even sure who suggested it. But no albacore ever rose to a lure quicker than we did to that one. And I *do* remember that it was *I* who had the sleeping pills.

I got the little bottle out of my drug kit and emptied the powder from four red-and-green capsules into an old-fashioned glass. Four. Should do the trick and still not be

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lethal, we figured.

I added some sugar, a little ice, three fingers of bourbon, and an orange slice. The barbiturate provided its own bitters. And when Clancy obligingly wove back along the dock to the cruiser at the appropriate moment, we welcomed him as if we weren't all ready to slit his throat.

Clancy downed the "cocktail" in two gulps. Ten minutes later he was out cold in his bunk and the four of us tiptoed off The Idyll, took a taxi into downtown San Diego, and had a delicious Mexican dinner. He was still out when we returned to Shelter Island, and still sleeping like a baby when we headed, at three the following morning, for the hoped-for albacore schools.

By the time dawn broke, the shoreline had vanished over our eastern horizon and we had two lines out. I was making coffee in the galley. Mark was at the wheel. Pete was checking the bait tank. Kevin moved past me to double-check on our sleeping beauty.

There was a moment's silence in the bunk area and when Kevin came back, his usually bland and likeable features were distorted with shock and alarm.

"I'm afraid he's—dead," he swallowed. "The combination of the booze and barbiturates."

I remember dropping the coffee pot. "Dead?" I echoed. *"Dead?"*

Kevin nodded. "As a doornail. As yesterday's headlines."

Kevin is a sharp young man and I should have believed him, but while he went to pass the grotesque news on to his father and Pete, I had to take a look myself.

Clancy was dead, all right. Or certainly seemed dead. His body was rigid, his eyes were glassy. I did what I thought I was supposed to do, though my acquaintance with death has been somewhat limited. Tried to find a heartbeat, to detect a breath. But his lips were cold as stone and I could feel no pulse, no anything. I thumbed his eyelids closed, pulled a blanket up over his face, stepped into the head where I was sick for a minute, then went up on deck.

Mark and Pete passed me in dreadful silence on the hatchway—to make their own investigation and reach the same horrifying conclusion.

It was one of those foggy early mornings that happen too frequently off San Diego in mid-summer—a thick mist hanging heavily over a sea the color and consistency of wrinkled silver. Through it, about half a mile away—which was the extent of our visibility—I saw that a trim schooner had already run up a flag, indicating a marlin aboard. But what kind of flag do you run up when you've just landed your first corpse of the day?

Being a boat owner, and a very practical Irishman, Mark's immediate reaction—when he took over the wheel again from Kevin—was to

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suggest advising the Coast Guard of a death on The Idyll via the radiotelephone. Pete put the first chill on this.

"I can't afford it," he said.

"Can't *afford* it?" Mark looked at him, puzzled.

Pete nodded. "Think of the headlines! What they might do to what's left of my career and my reputation. There'll be an autopsy. They'll discover that we—murdered Clancy. It'll be curtains for Peter Rust. Curtains," he added, "for all of us."

"I'm the skipper of this boat," Mark said brusquely. "I'll make the decision."

He started to switch on the radiotelephone, but Pete grabbed his arm. "No, Mark, *No!* We have to think of some other way!"

"Like what?"

"Well," Pete extemporized, "everybody on Shelter Island knows Clancy was loaded yesterday afternoon when he came back on board. And just maybe he was so loaded that he slipped and—fell—" The sentence trailed off meaningly.

"Off this cruiser?" Mark asked. "At sea?"

Pete nodded, the idea growing. "We thought he was still asleep, but he must have gotten up in the night. We just discovered he was missing, just now."

"And how do you plan to get rid of the body?"

"Throw him overboard. How else? If there's some spare anchor chain, we can wrap it around him. They'll never find him."

Mark shook his head. "No," he said, "we can't do that."

Pete looked at me for help, and knew what was going through my mind. I had a certain reputation to maintain, too. Not much of one, maybe. But I'd just sold my latest novel to a studio for a sum which had attracted respectable attention. And there was Sally, of course. And little Sally, not quite three. How would a Hollywood writer, with a supposedly happy family, look in a "mug" shot? On a witness stand? Maybe even behind cell bars? Or worse, in the gas chamber at San Quentin?

I nodded at Pete's look and turned to Mark. "It's something to think about," I told our host. "No one would ever doubt the story. The way it is now, we're only asking for trouble—serious trouble."

"We're *in* serious trouble," Kevin reminded me.

"Sure," Pete agreed, turning to Mark's son. "And how about you? With that fine new career you're starting to build? And a pregnant young wife? So we alert the Coast Guard and take his body back, and somehow avoid the rap. So what? How are your rich, prospective clients going to like dealing with an architect, or anybody else, even vaguely suspected of overdosing and killing a close friend with drugs?"

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"It's dad's boat," Kevin said. "He's the boss."

"Okay," Pete wheeled back on Mark, "you want to get your own son and two of your best buddies implicated in a murder? As well as yourself? When all we have to do is just—just toss the evidence overboard, and return to the harbor, and stick to our story?"

"No," Mark assured him, "I don't want to get us implicated. Not at all. But we have to do what's honest and right."

"You're nuts!" Pete flared. "We're *all* nuts! For having gotten ourselves in this mess in the first place! Then not having enough sense to get out of it! Four careers up in smoke, four families' lives ruined. Kids involved. Kids—" he looked at Kevin, who glanced away "—who aren't even born yet."

"What about Clancy's kids?" Mark reminded him. "He's got three—two boys in college, a girl still in high school. Do you think you could look them straight in the eye, Pete, and tell them their father fell off this cruiser by accident?"

"I could sure try," Pete said. "I could sure give it an Academy Award performance."

During all this Mark's right hand had remained on the wheel, his left on the radiotelephone. Now the one on the radiophone dropped to his side. And I saw that little muscle twitch beneath his right eye, the tic he sometimes got in his cheek when he was tired or upset. And saw the tip of his tongue run across his lower lip, then form a thoughtful ball in the side of his jaw. His eyes left Pete's and found mine.

"I—I think Pete may be right," I said finally. "Clancy's dead. *Taking* him back won't *bring* him back. And we all have our own lives to lead—"

Without comment Mark's eyes moved on to Kevin who shrugged, his hands separating in a silent gesture as he hung his head. His fine new career. His unborn baby.

Two minutes later Pete and I carried Clancy's heavy body up the narrow hatchway and threw it overboard. The body bounced into the boat's wake, seemed to flail about almost lifelike for a moment, then started to sink. Several curious seagulls dove after it, discovered their error, and circled back into the sky again.

Mark gunned the motors, but instead of heading for the distant coastline he turned south past the schooner which now lay between us and the western horizon.

"Establishing a false course," he explained, at my puzzled look, "before I call the Coast Guard. You're the writer. Isn't it always a good idea for murderers to get away from the scene of the crime?"

When I went below, Kevin was policing-up Clancy's bunk. Pete followed me down the hatchway, got a botttle of vodka out of the galley icebox, took a long drag on it, then

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offered it to me. The liquor was hot and cold at the same time—the throat of the bottle frosty against my lips but its contents burning all the way down my gullet.

I took another long swallow, then extended the bottle to Kevin as he moved in from Clancy's bunk. But Kevin gestured no. Maybe he was right. Maybe now was no time to drink to the dear departed.

An hour later, and five miles off the east end of San Clemente Island, Mark put in his call to the authorities. I'm not very familiar with such tactics, and I don't remember too well what he said—only that he identified the boat and himself, told them we'd lost a man overboard and were retracing our course, but were almost out of fuel. He asked for a search party and a boat to bring us more gasoline.

In almost no time a helicopter was over us and a Coast Guard boat was tying up to us with more fuel. But Clancy Eggers was floating—or sinking or *sunk*—a considerable distance to the north. And presently we were advised to report in at harbor headquarters.

"What'll happen now?" Pete asked, as Kevin took the wheel and headed back toward Point Loma, Mark dropping into a canvas chair on the boat's deck.

Mark shrugged. "They'll ask us some questions. We'll probably have to sign sworn statements. Maybe the San Diego police will be called in, I don't know. Let's go over our story again. Let's be sure all of us have the same one, and don't slip up."

"Don't worry," Pete said, polishing off the rest of the vodka, "the only slip that's been made on this trip was when Clancy slipped. And fell into the deep six."

It is always a longer trip back to port than it is out to sea. Some naval vessels were on maneuver off Coronado, which slowed us up. The usual Sunday morning flotilla of sailboats skimmed across the outer water below Point Loma, presenting their brilliantly spinnaker'd hazards. But finally we were passing the buoys marking the entrance to San Diego Harbor and pulling up to the Coast Guard station on our starboard side—just as we saw the trim schooner we had sighted earlier pull away from the station ahead of us. The schooner was under steam, not sail.

The Coast Guard men were noncommittal in their summary search of the boat, and the officer who asked most of the questions was courteous and polite.

When was the last time we saw Clancy Eggers alive? About six o'clock the night before.

Was he asleep when we returned from dinner? Yes.

Didn't we miss him during the night? No, we thought he was still asleep.

Were we all awake and on deck when we headed for sea, rigged up our lines, started breakfast?

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We had answers for this, too—oh, we were really prepared! We'd taken turns at the wheel and on watch, we said, and all of us had taken brief naps in our bunks. It had been very dark and very foggy. Clancy Eggers must have awakened, wanted air, made his way up the hatch to the deck without any of us noticing and slipped (or staggered—we emphasized this) overboard.

When did we first know he was gone? Just before we called in, about eight o'clock.

Were we east of San Clemente Island at the time? Yes, about five miles.

From the officer's alert yet expressionless eyes it was hard to tell how we were doing. Guilt is the most transparent of complexes, and I had a feeling ours was tattooed on our foreheads.

But apparently not. Mark's protests helped. If they were through questioning us, our skipper wanted to get The Idyll back to her mooring. It had been a bad enough experience for him and his guests without all this third-degreeing. He was sure the officer would understand.

I wasn't so sure—not by the enigmatic way the officer looked at him for a long minute. But then he shrugged slightly, nodded, and slipped off the rail on which he'd been perched as he questioned us.

"Of course, Mr. Brady," he said. "I can understand your being upset, and I'm sorry. But I have a job to do, whether any of us like it or not." He gestured along the marina. "Okay, run your boat in."

We watched him and his aides walk back to their station in the glittering sunshine. From the isthmus joining Shelter Island to the mainland we heard the booming of a small cannon, signaling that a record marlin had been brought in by the schooner, weighed, and measured. None of us said a word as Mark started The Idyll's engines; Kevin untied her, leaped aboard, and we headed for our dock.

What was there to say? Probably better just to keep quiet, gather our strength for Clancy's wife and for whatever stories we'd have to tell the newspapers ("I can see the headlines now," Pete broke the silence. "Prominent broker lost at sea! Film star on ill-fated voyage!" We told him to shut up).

Just get The Idyll into her pier. Wash her down. Somehow find the car (and get a new ignition key made for it), and head for home on the double. Traffic is bad from San Diego to Los Angeles late Sunday afternoon. It's always the worst part of the trip.

We sponged off the boat, showered, and changed our clothes in a washroom at the mooring. Then we started out to find Clancy's car somewhere in the mile-long parking area paralleling the moorings—among the old jalopies whose owners seldom untied their beat-up scows at all—just used them to drink beer on, on week-ends;

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among the fancy little foreign cars whose owners raced up and down the bay in starboats and sleek yawls; among the big black limousines, to match the floating palaces.

Finally, at long last, we found Clancy's battered, tan station wagon which could well be associated with a cruiser like The Idyll.

"Here we are," Kevin said, as we approached the car. "Now if we can get a locksmith—"

He stopped dead, staring at the front seat of the car. And I followed his look, sensing—rather than seeing or feeling or hearing—Mark stiffen beside me, and Pete draw in his breath.

Because apparently we didn't need to get a locksmith. The car was already unlocked, and a guy was slipping out from under the wheel—a tall guy with slightly bleary eyes and an oblique and self-conscious (or was it reproachful and bitter?) grin. Looking at us defensively (or was it condemningly, and very cool?).

"Hi, fellows," he said simply. "They sure pick up some strange creatures in nets off this coast, don't they?"

Mark was the first to find his voice—aghast and half cracking, but he found it. "Clancy! Clancy *Eggers.*"

Clancy nodded. "Lucky that schooner fished me out of the briny, even if its radiophone was out of whack. I'd be shark bait for sure, if she hadn't."

Now Pete discovered ***he*** could talk. "But how'd you get here? And get the car unlocked?"

"I got the car unlocked with a duplicate key I keep taped under the bumper," Clancy explained. "And I got here, because the Coast Guard loaned me some dry clothes and dropped me off. They wanted me to stay at their station until you came in. But I wanted to *really* surprise you.

"In fact," he added, opening a rear door of the station wagon and starting to throw our stuff in, "I wanted to give all four of you the shock of your lives!"

I looked from him to Mark to Kevin to Pete, then we helped him with the rest of the gear and got in the car after him.

Again none of us said anything—not the four conspirators, anyway. What was there to say? That our diagnosis had been a little hasty and a little wrong? It wasn't the first time someone had been thought dead, who wasn't. And we were not doctors. Brokers, writers, actors, and architects—our specialty was life, not death.

So none of us said anything—until we missed the turn north, and Clancy, behind the wheel, was turning south instead.

"You should've turned to the left back there, Clancy," Mark told him. "We're heading for Los Angeles."

"We're not," Clancy said briefly.

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"We're heading for the San Diego Police Department."

I felt Pete's fingers tighten on my arm and saw Kevin lean his head back on the seat and blow out a long lungful of cigarette smoke.

"Why there?" Mark asked, his voice cracking.

Clancy shrugged. "They have jurisdiction over the Coast Guard in—accidents like this."

Mark's laugh was completely humorless. "The luckiest accident we ever had."

"I hope so," Clancy said. "It all depends on what their lab finds on that glass."

"What glass?" Mark choked.

"The one you guys made my old-fashioned in last night."

Mark took a beat. "All the glasses were washed when I closed up the galley," he said finally.

"Not that one," Clancy told him. "Just before I passed out I put it under my bunk. And I have a funny little feeling that one of the Coast Guard boys found it there when they were going over The Idyll."

In an automatic gesture Pete reached for the door. But Clancy glanced around briefly, shaking his head.

"If I were you, Pete, I wouldn't try anything. That unmarked car behind us has two plainclothes men in it. With loaded guns. Sorry, fellows," he sighed. "What's the old saying? He who laughs last—?"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 301st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an unusual story for EQMM, as you will see, but we could not resist its mood, its atmosphere, its curious feeling of "rightness" rarely found in a "first story" . . .

When Bradley Strickland wrote and submitted "The Third Grave" to EQMM, he was 17 — yes, only 17—which makes the "rightness" all the more remarkable. This teen-age beginner shows tremendous promise. He has lived his whole life in the tiny village of New Holland, Georgia. When we accepted "The Third Grave," young Bradley was still in high school.

He started reading mysteries when he was ten—Sherlock Holmes, of course, but, Bradley wrote us, "favorite fiction characters are quickly formed by the young; mine were soon Gardner's Perry Mason, Christie's Hercule Poirot, and Ellery Queen's E.Q. At the same time I read in awe all the works of Poe, Bierce, and Lovecraft."

The youthful author's plans "include college, with a major in chemistry, and the pursuit of my hobbies—reading and writing mystery stories. I shall doubtless have to work my way through college. I am unable to think of a more stimulating and enjoyable mode of doing so than by writing mysteries."

Well, Bradley, EQMM will do all it can to help you—just send in more stories!

THE THIRD GRAVE

by BRADLEY STRICKLAND

THE MORNING SUN WAS A YELLOW eye over his shoulder, watching his progress even as it made him sweat at this early hour. Jody Lawson walked down the dirt road toward town as he had been walking for the past four hours, more like a plodding, mindless automaton than a man. Ahead of him, in the road, lay an oddly shaped black mass. Puzzled, Jody changed direction to see what it was.

A horde of flies protested as they rose in a cloud from the rotting, stinking remnants of a dead rat. Jody turned and retched. It wasn't, he realized, the obscene foulness of the rat's carcass; it was more the

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very feel of the place. Ever since Jody had come to himself he had sensed a dead, dull pall over everything around him. Even now, the nearly cloudless morning sky seemed pale and leaden, the atmosphere stagnant and stifling. And his nearness to home, plus the memory of the ruined churchyard, intensified all the lifelessness around him.

The churchyard and the grave. That mysterious middle grave, precisely where no grave should have been. For the third time that day Jody shook his head, unable to solve the riddle and unwilling to admit his bewilderment. And then suddenly Jody was aware of the town.

He blinked and looked at the place which had been his home before the war—before he had left Lora, had been wounded, had lost his memory—before violence and hatred had changed him. Dixville, too, had changed.

Jody could recall other hot summer mornings which had been much like this one, yet infinitely different. As a boy of sixteen, he had come into town with his father, and his father had bought him a pony at Lafe's Livery Stable. He remembered how he had only half listened to his father and Lafe talking of slavery and secession and a lot of other things Jody had considered unimportant.

The town had looked alive to Jody that day, the buildings whitewashed and proud in the sun. Now, four years later, they were smoke-grayed, charred mockeries of the way they had looked to a sixteen-year-old astride a young, lively pony. The town, like his own life, Jody thought, had been blackened and battered to a grotesque caricature.

Jody stopped short, ran a bronzed hand through his sun-bleached uncut hair as he stared at the board sign over what had been the door to Hawkinson's Land Office. In rude, hand-painted letters, the sign read:

ABEL BRYCE
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW

And almost before he realized it, Jody was running hard for the door, his weariness and depression forgotten. Abel Bryce who, next to his father, was the man Jody had most respected, had been the family's friend as well as its lawyer; now, for Jody, he was a direct link to the past—and to Lora.

Bryce himself opened the door at Jody's second insistent knock and looked at him with no trace of recognition. Jody could only stare. If he had changed as much as Bryce, Jody thought, the lack of knowledge on the part of the lawyer was understandable. Bryce's hair, once a full, dark-brown, had become an iron-gray. His once hard, dominating face seemed to have fallen in on itself; his square shoulders drooped as if from old age. Only the clear, eagle-like blue eyes seemed the same.

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"Yes?" asked the forty-seven-year-old Bryce.

"Mr. Bryce, it's me—me, Jody Lawson."

And then Jody started to cry. It was, he felt, unmanly and unworthy of an ex-Confederate soldier, but he couldn't help himself. Jody's tensions, fears, disappointments of the past few years came out as a flood of uncontrollable tears.

Thoroughly ashamed of himself, he allowed Mr. Bryce to take him into the dark coolness of the office. The older man scarcely spoke; it was better that way. Eventually Jody managed to stop sobbing. Only then did Bryce begin to talk directly to him.

"That's better," said the soft, educated drawl. "You sure must have been through a lot, boy. Like to scared me to death when I saw who you were. We all thought you were dead, you know."

"No, sir. I been off my head for over eighteen months, Mr. Bryce. Getting wounded at Gettysburg was the last I remembered till I came wandering into a town in Tennessee, two months ago. Took 'em a week to convince me the war was over. You see," Jody added as an apology, "I couldn't even remember my name up to a few weeks ago. That's why I didn't write."

"Things must have gone hard for you, boy."

Jody did not reply at once, but looked curiously around the office. The furniture was a queer assortment of odds and ends, and the one window was too far away to admit much light. Jody remembered having seen the big building which had formerly housed Bryce's office. It was now a burned-out husk on the main street of Dixville.

"Things have been hard for you, too, haven't they?"

Bryce smiled wearily. "Oh, we get along. My daughter and I can live decently off my law work. God knows there's enough of it, what with every clodhopping farmer receiving real or imagined abuses at the hands of carpetbaggers. Lora and I manage."

Jody sat back in his chair. "Lora. I sure hope she hasn't changed. Mr. Bryce, have you ever had the feelin' of death?"

The older man's face went blank. "What do you mean, Jody?"

"Well, I can't explain it. I can try to tell you about it, though. While ago, I saw a grave. It wasn't an ordinary one, and it bothered me. Ever since, I've felt like I'm lookin' at the world through the eyes of a dead man. The world's changin', sort of slipping away from me, and I can't catch hold of it. Aw, hell, I told you I couldn't explain."

"It's the war, Jody. The war has changed a lot of things, and you have to get used to them. Have you had lunch?"

"No, sir."

"Well, here, then," said Bryce, opening his desk. "Let's eat, and

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I'll try to catch you up with some things."

Bryce took a fair-sized meal from the drawer, removed a bottle of coffee, and found two cups.

"Coffee's lukewarm," he apologized. "I find it easier eating here than running home in the middle of the day. Now, don't protest, you're going to help me dispose of this food. You need it, and what I have to say can wait."

For some minutes they ate in silence, Jody voraciously, Bryce pensively. Then, when they had finished, Bryce leaned back in his chair, intertwined his fingers, and began to speak.

"Nearly two years since we last heard of you," he said, his keen eyes looking deeply into Jody's. "Nearly two years, and we all were sure you'd been killed at Gettysburg in '63. No body was found, of course, but you were reported missing, and the town had lost three other boys on the same bloody ground and, all in all, we kind of buried you mentally.

"It killed your mother, thinking you were dead—that, and the knowledge that Sherman was coming closer and closer. She was certain she'd be mauled by every Yank devil passing through, then locked in the burning plantation house while your father was being flayed alive outside."

In spite of himself, Jody smiled. The account sounded just like his overly imaginative, flighty mother.

"Then," Bryce continued, "your father was called up when all able-bodied men between sixteen and sixty were needed to halt Sherman's advance toward Atlanta. I went with him, and we both went through hell. He wasn't lucky. I was." The lawyer grimaced. "You did know about your folks, didn't you?"

Jody nodded. "Yeah. I saw the graveyard on the way into town. I noticed the church had been burned down and I went into the churchyard to look around. By the way, Mr. Bryce, how'd that happen? The church, I mean."

The lawyer shrugged. "Some said it was hit by lightnin'. Some said it was started by a bunch of drunken Yankees raising hell. I don't know."

"Well," Jody resumed, "I went inside to look around, and the first thing I saw were the graves of my parents. I saw the dates 1863 and 1864 on the headstones. But what scared me was the third grave. I was afraid that Lora—"

"Hold on, son. Third grave?" interrupted Bryce.

"Yes, sir. That's what I was talking about a while ago. This third grave was between Ma's and my father's, and fresher-looking than the other two. Didn't have any gravestone, just a plain oak board at the head. No name, no date, nothing at all carved on it. The thing sort of worried me when I saw it. Still does."

Bryce was shaking his head.

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"There's no grave there, Jody. I was in the churchyard not long ago."

"It's there now."

"If you say so," Bryce said dubiously.

"It's there, and I want to know who's in it. Can't we dig it up, Mr. Bryce?"

"I'll have to see the coroner. Are you sure about this, boy?"

"Damn it, I said I was, didn't I?" Jody exploded.

"Calm down, boy. I'll attend to it. Now, you're positive about that headboard? No name or date?"

"Nothing. God, if there's a Yankee in it—"

"Don't get worked up so. I told you we'll see to it. Have you been to your house yet?"

Jody shook his head. "Came straight on into town after I saw the grave. The house gone, too?"

"No. The Yankees quartered their officers in it when they took the town. There was some looting, no doubt, but no serious damage. After the war the politicians didn't waste any time. They gave the slaves the pastureland up near the woods, tried to auction off your house, cottonfield, and the bottoms. Unfortunately, they overlooked one fact. Nobody had any money. The house and most of the land are still yours, boy."

"Good. I'll need it if I'm gonna be a family man. Hey!" exclaimed Jody. "Here I been sitting and I haven't even asked after Lora. She is all right, isn't she?"

Bryce smiled and for the first time looked like the man he had been. "She's fine, Jody. And she'll feel a lot better when she sees you. Lora always told me she didn't believe you were dead." Bryce was thoughtful. "Look here," he said, "I guess you want to see my daughter, don't you?"

Jody grinned.

"So," the lawyer continued, "you go out to the house—my house, I mean, where Doc Winfield used to live—see Lora, tell her you want the buggy, and take her up to look over the house with you. I'll see the coroner about that grave and tell you this evening what I find out."

Jody stood up, took the older man's hand in a firm handshake. "Thanks, Mr. Bryce."

"Thank you, Jody, for coming back. Be kind to Lora, son. Remember, she's been through a lot too."

"I will, sir," said Jody from the door.

Outside, the noon sun was beginning to slip to the west. To the south and east were myriads of fluffy white clouds, holding promise of a cooling rain for the afternoon. Jody hurried.

He saw her when he was still a hundred yards away. The house was just outside of town. Of course, it had a garden; and, of course, Lora was in the garden, dressed in calico and with a bonnet over her auburn hair.

Lora saw him at the same time, and ran to meet him. Jody took her

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in his arms and kissed her, suddenly forgetting the war, the death in the air, the grave. As he held her, he realized that she, too, had changed, but for the better.

He remembered her as a pretty eighteen-year-old. Now she had the beauty of maturity, belying her twenty-two years. And certainly Jody thought her even more entrancing in calico than she had been in her gay satin gowns. Lora was crying, but there was a light of triumph behind the tears, as though the tender reunion were completely worth the bitter years of waiting.

Later they rode in silence down the lane, past the ruined church, toward Jody's house. The woods banked the road at either side, and occasionally a frightened young rabbit darted across their path. The clouds were more numerous now, causing shadows to flit and flick down the road, momentarily obscuring the sun. Honeysuckles along the edge of the woods drifted fragrantly past, mistlike. For the first time Jody began to feel at home again. It was a good feeling.

Abruptly they left the woods, and Jody reined the mule to a halt. Jody and Lora sat and contemplated what was to be their home. The walls were gray and peeling, the windows strangely still. Around them the raw red earth had shouldered through the grass. Already the earth showed the ruts and rocks so characteristic of erosion in a rainy locality.

"It's awful," Jody muttered.

"No, darling, it's beautiful. It's more beautiful now than it ever was, and when you have it ready we'll move in and have a dozen little boys who'll boast about the fine home their daddy owns."

Jody laughed and hugged her. "Lora, with you to help me, I'll make the place look like the State Capitol."

"I hope not," she said ruefully. "It burned down."

"Well, we'll make it look grander than the White House. Even outdo Mr. Linc—I mean, the President. Yes, M'am, we'll have her so smart and pretty the governor will drop in just to see the inside." Jody grinned and helped her down from the buggy.

"I do believe you intend to pamper me, sir."

"Shucks, yes, as much as I can. Girl like you needs to be pampered," Jody said as they walked across the veranda to the front door. "Will you permit me to carry you across the threshold of your magnificent new dwelling, M'am?" he asked with mock gravity.

"Why, of course, sir," she said, dimpling. They both laughed. Jody tried the door.

"That's odd. It isn't supposed to be locked, is it?"

"I don't think so. What's wrong?" asked the girl.

"The knob won't turn. Like it's frozen in this one position."

"Maybe it's rusted, Jody."

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Jody tried again. "It's rusted or locked. This knob isn't going to budge an inch." Jody hit the handle with his fist, tried the knob once more. "No good. I'll have to open a window. Wait here."

He had just rounded the corner of the house when he heard Lora's call.

"Jody!"

"Right here, Lora. What's the mat—" He broke off as he stepped onto the veranda and saw Lora standing in front of the open door.

"What the devil—how did you do it?"

"I just took hold of the knob and it turned as easy as you please. I guess I don't know my own strength."

Jody kissed her lightly. "Just promise me we won't have any fights. I'd hate to be afraid of my own wife."

"Oh, go on," she said, and flounced into the house. Jody followed close at her heels. The long dark hall was infested with spider webs. The skeletal remains of a long-dead chipmunk and several dry brown leaves indicated that the house had been open during the previous late fall or early winter. Entering the front parlor, Jody saw that it was hardly better.

The furniture had been covered with sheets, and the scene was like a deserted cemetery, the shrouded chairs resembling cold white gravestones. The dark, stale air was as heavy with memories as with dust. Discolored with the damp, the yellow-gray wallpaper hung in jagged strips.

Above them a huge chandelier swayed in the draft from the open door. A humming, indefinite noise told Jody that somewhere a broken window was crying in the freshening afternoon wind. Beside him, Lora shivered involuntarily. When she spoke, it was in a whisper.

"Jody, it's all so changed."

"Couple of years makes a lot of difference, honey. But we'll have it fixed up again, soon. Have her brighter'n a new penny. Grow farm crops in the bottoms, cotton across the river. No horses, though—pastures are gone. Cotton's goin' to be high for some time now. After one good season we'll have this place lookin' so good you won't recognize it."

She shook her head, dissatisfied apparently with Jody's assurances. "I didn't mean it looked different. It *is* different, somehow. I can feel it. The house isn't at all the way it used to be. Hold me," she said suddenly. "I'm scared."

Jody wrapped his arm around her. "Don't worry, Lora, there's nothing to be afraid of. This is the same house it always was, no more and no less. Now, what's past is past. You aren't goin' to start believing in ghosts, are you?"

"I can't help it, Jody. There's death in this house. I can feel it. I know it as surely as I'm standing

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here. Let's go, Jody, now," she pleaded.

He looked around. The windows were grime-dimmed, the chandelier was revolving slowly, so that its crystals reflected the dirty half-light. Little diamonds of the reflected light raced around the room, like a dim swarm of fireflies. Gloom brooded in every corner. The mood was depressing, Jody thought, but not really frightening. He started for the door with Lora.

"You're goin' to have to quit being a scairdy-cat after we settle. Why, I'll probably get drunk as a coot twice a week and you'll have to rassle me down to keep the creepin' horrors away."

At the door Jody turned. He could see the parlor as it had been before war and decay had taken their toll. He could remember the photograph that he had been so proud of, the one of him in his uniform, taken when he was eighteen. There was, he saw, a picture lying face down on the mantel.

"Wait right here a minute, honey. I want to get something." He strode across the room, picked up the photograph, and started back when—

"Jody, look out!"

There was a crash as the huge crystal chandelier shattered close beside him. Instinctively, Jody leaped sideways. Shaken but unharmed, he realized that death had missed him by inches. Jody hurried the near-hysterical Lora outside.

"Jody, Jody, you might have been killed," she sobbed.

"I'm all right, darling. The chain must have rusted and snapped. Look here," he said, holding up the picture. Lora looked—and screamed.

Then for the first time Jody looked at the photograph. The uniform was his, but the face was a grinning death's-head. Lora was crying convulsively. Jody took her back to the buggy and examined the photograph.

"Look," he said, "the face has been scraped away. One of those damn Yankees did it. Don't cry."

"Let's go home, Jody, I'm so frightened."

"All right, dear, but first we'll look at our land."

"Can't we just go home, Jody? Now?"

"I want to look at the land. But first," Jody said as a rumble of distant thunder rolled across the hill, "I'll put up the top."

As they rode toward the river, a harsh wind gathered the clouds. They piled into high, angry-looking pillars, darkening the entire sky. The mule, sensing a storm in the making, was skittish. The wind quickly became cooler, blowing before it the heat of midday.

They mounted the rise which looked down on the river, and Jody swore softly. Below them, where there had once been prime land, the river had widened into a brown, stagnant-looking expanse of water. The bottomland had been entirely

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flooded. In the distance the cotton-field was a red scar on the earth.

"Why? Oh, dear God, why?" Jody asked. "A man comes home like he was returnin' from the dead, and finds ruination wherever he goes. Why, God?"

The only answer was a streak of sinuous lightning and a peal of thunder. "Hush, Jody," said Lora, her voice husky. "Don't blaspheme. We'll get by."

"Get by? How? With the bottoms full of water and the topsoil washed off the cottonfield? We goin' to clear off some woods? You know how much money that takes, Lora? Have to let half our land go just to get started. Damn! Looks like you got a first-rate fool for a husband. I wouldn't have come back if I'd known it was goin' to be like this."

"Not even for me, Jody?"

He softened. "Of course, for you. I'd go anywhere for you, darling. We'll work it out somehow."

They rode back in a silence that was broken only by the nearing thunder. They had reached the forks when Jody turned the mule toward the burned-out church.

"Jody," Lora pleaded.

"I want to see that grave again. Seems like everything started with that grave."

They stopped short of the churchyard and for a while Jody gazed at the three neglected graves.

Suddenly Jody jumped to the ground and opened the toolbox on the side of the buggy.

"Jody, what are you doing?"

"That middle grave is the cause of all this, I'm sure of it. I aim to find out what's in it."

"No, Jody!"

"I have to. I'm not superstitious, you know that. But I have to know."

"Jody, if you love me, don't dig up that grave!" Lora was crying again.

"I got to. Turn your head if you don't want to see," Jody called over his shoulder.

"Jody, please!"

He had already started. Shivering, her eyes averted, Lora tried not to hear the chink-thud as Jody turned up spadefuls of earth. Beads of perspiration stood on her forehead, and she reeled slightly on the buggy seat. The rain began, gentle at first, then increasing in intensity.

The digging noises still came from somewhere behind her. Lora wept softly to herself. She started at the ominous scrape of metal on wood; Jody had reached the coffin.

"Jody?" she quavered. "Jody, what is it?"

Bryce and the coroner found her there in the churchyard, much later. She was kneeling in the rain, whimpering like a child, next to the fresh red clay of the middle grave. Her wide staring eyes were fixed on the weathered words carved into the oak:

JODY LAWSON
1843–1863
R.I.P.

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SUI GENERIS

There are stories that are best told tersely, harshly. There are stories best told with bursts of rhetoric, others with the utmost simplicity. There are stories that call for poetic imagery, for machine-gun rat-a-tat-tat, for the strictest realism, for fancy and fantasy, even for a deliberate drabness . . . indeed, the list is almost endless, since each plot, each set of characters, each background, suggests a tone, if not all its own, at least somewhat different from the style exactly appropriate for another plot, another background, another cast of characters. And, of course, there are stories that cannot be rushed in the telling; they must take their own time to unfold, they must develop at a more leisurely pace, they must sink more slowly into the reader's receptivity.

Jane Speed's newest story (and how she continues to fulfill her promise, to reach toward her potential!) is not of the fast, grating, or slambang school. It chooses its own inherent speed, growing, growing . . . warmly human, sympathetically understanding, probing with the gentle touch of a highly skilled surgeon.

Now meet Andrew MacEwan, 76, and fighting his years—and what a gallant fight! In the middle of one night he heard sounds—and no one believed him; but those footsteps on the roof became, one might say, symbolic of the footsteps in his own life, the footsteps we all must hear above us sooner or later, whether we listen for them or not; and old Mr. MacEwan would not deny hearing them, no matter what anyone said. He was a man who faced up to "the indignities that seemed to be an inevitable accompaniment to getting older" . . .

SOUNDS IN THE NIGHT

by JANE SPEED

THE SOOT-DARKENED BUILDINGS that line most of the streets in Manhattan's upper West Side exude a uniform mellow shabbiness. They differ from one another chiefly in whatever vestiges remain in them of past strivings for gentility: here a lobby ceiling embellished with meaningless intricate flourishes of raised plaster, there a network of iron scrolls backing finger-smeared glass doors, and on some a name—

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The Atlantis, The Shalimar, The Alhambra—as incongruously exotic as the Cadiz and Lima and Athens that turn out to be homey towns in Ohio.

In one of these buildings, whose particular distinction was a garland of chipped cement roses entwined over the front entrance, the tenants with bedroom windows opening onto the courtyard were startled out of their sleep by a sudden sound a little after three o'clock on a morning in early May.

They remained suspended for a few minutes in a state of puzzled, resentful semi-wakefulness. Then, since whatever it was that had roused them was not repeated, they simply turned over and resumed their slumbers.

In Apartment 6A, Andrew MacEwan was about to do the same when a second sound caught his dwindling attention. It was not loud, but it was so familiar that he recognized it at once; someone was walking on the roof just above him.

Living on the top floor as he did, Mr. MacEwan heard this sound almost every day now that the weather was getting warm—the firm, busy tread of a woman hanging out her wash, the heavier one of a repairman servicing a television antenna, and just late yesterday the footsteps of Mr. Radovic, the building superintendent, up there with his bucket of tar patching the roof.

Mr. MacEwan shifted so that his eye fell on the luminous dial of his clock, and the incompatibility of the sound and the hour finally penetrated his sleep-fogged mind. What, he wondered hazily, could anyone possibly find to do up there at this time of night? But by now the footsteps had stopped and drowsiness was pulling hard at him. So, with the unanswered question still dangling uneasily on the fringes of his consciousness, he too slipped back into sleep . . .

At the first jarring ring Mr. MacEwan's right hand groped its way to the clock, turned off the alarm, and fumbled hastily back to the shelter of the blankets. Then his left hand reached over, quite as instinctively, to Bessie's side of the bed, and as usual it was the sharp recoil of surprise at finding her place empty that jolted him wide-awake.

He lay staring at the ceiling till the familar thudding sense of loss subsided, then he sighed the smallest of sighs. It seemed he was doomed to make this discovery anew every morning; a habit of nearly half a century could hardly be expected to loosen its grip in a few short years. But by now at least, he knew better than to dwell on these bad moments. He eased into a sitting position and sensibly addressed himself to the task of getting out of bed.

There was a certain amount of suspense connected with this humble operation. Would the stiffness in his right knee, for example, have

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become overnight a permanent part of his repertoire of accumulated infirmities? Or would he be able to limber it up into yet one more day's worth of useful service?

It was not until he had struggled into the new maroon flannel bathrobe and stood with his feet encased in a pair of old felt scuffs that he finally permitted himself a smile of cautious optimism. He glanced in fond apology at the handsome leather slippers sitting pristinely in a corner. They and the robe had been a 76th birthday gift from his daughter, Elizabeth, and one of these days he really was going to break in the slippers; but not first thing in the morning, and not this morning.

The *first* thing for Andrew MacEwan, this morning as every morning, was to walk into his living room, sit down in his favorite chair, and quietly revel in the only glory of his apartment—a window that looked west across the Hudson River. The early rays of the sun, catching the green of the trees that grew thick as moss on the face of the Palisades and glinting off a window here and there along the New Jersey shore, seemed to him a fine and hopeful sight with which to start the day. Nothing could quite spoil his enjoyment of it, not even the unending hum of cars from the West Side Highway, all too unedifyingly visible far below him.

It was true that in the 40 years since he and Bessie and little Elizabeth first moved here, the view had been grievously encroached upon by newer, taller buildings that had sprung up on the side of the street nearer the river. Yes, even that timeworn source of mingled outrage and pride, the George Washington Bridge, was lost to his sight now. But as the scope of his view had been whittled down, there had seemed to grow in him a compensatingly heightened awareness and appreciation of what was left for him to see.

In much the same way it pleased him to reflect, as he walked back to the bathroom and laid out his shaving things, that advancing age had also encroached on his life, slowing his pace, curtailing his activities, narrowing down the possibilities. Surely then, he argued into the mirror, it was only natural that he should treasure all the more what was left—like these four admittedly undistinguished but reassuringly familiar rooms—with, he added tartly, the view from *his* side of the river.

Oh, he recognized and was duly grateful for the loving concern that prompted Elizabeth's efforts to persuade him to come and live with her and Harry and the grandchildren in West Englewood. But to Mr. MacEwan the prospect of spending the rest of his days on the *other* side of the river—and out of sight of the river at that—smacked of dreary exile. He put a new blade into his razor and lathered his face,

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more firmly resolved than ever to resist such a move with all the cunning at his command.

It was largely to this end that he arose at six on the dot every morning. He was still quite able to shave and dress himself thank you; it just took a little longer now. And the basic stratagem in his private campaign to hold the fort on the beloved status quo was to present a serenely neat and affable exterior to Mrs. Bassett when she should arrive at eight o'clock.

Elizabeth's "agent"—that was the way he thought of Mrs. Bassett. Ostensibly she came in every weekday to clean the apartment, do the laundry, give him his midday meal, and prepare a cold supper for him to eat later. These diversionary tactics did not deceive him for a moment. He knew perfectly well that her chief function was to keep an eye on him. Let him show the slightest sign of failing health or inability to cope, and Mrs. Bassett would be in touch with Headquarters like *that*.

He carefully finished off the last few strokes, rinsed his face, patted it dry, then leaned close to the mirror and inspected the results.

Mr. MacEwan spurned not only the "greasy kid stuff" but all other stuff as well, so his wispy white hair tended to stand out from his head in raffish disarray, enhancing the look of comic frailty that had settled down on him in his later years. When he had first reluctantly faced up to this effect it had rather disconcerted him, particularly when it gave rise to comments like the one of that wretched girl at the bus stop who had referred to him as "that sweet old man."

In time, however, he had grown accustomed to this as to all the indignities that seemed to be an inevitable accompaniment to getting older. And in recent years he had begun to look upon his appearance as a positive asset—a kind of disguise actually. Let Elizabeth and Mrs. Bassett—and indeed the world at large—dismiss him as no longer capable of offering either serious assistance or threat. All the better for his little plan that they should not suspect what manner of man they really had to deal with.

He gave his reflection a conspiratorial wink and went jauntily back to the bedroom.

By 7:15 he was in the kitchen, spruce and chipper in the armor of immaculate shirt and trousers, and ready for another day of matching wits with The Woman from D.A.U.G.H.T.E.R.

As he turned on the fire under the teakettle, Mr. MacEwan heard the sounds of some kind of hubbub down in the courtyard; mildly curious, he raised the kitchen window a little higher and stuck his head out to see what was going on.

Mr. Radovic and Jose, the porter, and a couple of other people were standing in a huddle around someone kneeling near the center of the courtyard. But what started the

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first pricking of apprehension up Mr. MacEwan's spine was the arrival of several uniformed policemen who came out of the basement door and hurried over to the group.

The kneeling man rose to speak to them and Mr. MacEwan realized it was David Kleinman (Sadie's son, the doctor) who was interning at nearby Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. Then David stepped back, gesturing upward, and Mr. MacEwan saw at last what the excitement was all about.

A woman was lying on the cement yard. He couldn't make out who she was but, as he watched, the word "suicide" ran through the group like a shudder and echoed ominously up the court.

There swept over Mr. MacEwan a sudden hot sense of the impropriety of his leaning out the window gawking like that, and he pulled his head hastily inside.

With trembling hands he began to potter about the kitchen in mindless agitation. It seemed imperative that he *do* something, but he couldn't for the life of him think what. He made himself a cup of tea and sat down at the table, but it grew cold in front of him as he tried in vain to imagine which of his neighbors could have been driven to this sad extreme.

He was actually grateful when eight o'clock finally arrived and he heard Mrs. Bassett's key in the lock. For one thing, the redoubtable Mrs. Bassett could be absolutely relied on to furnish him with all the details of the tragic business in the courtyard; she had an uncanny ability to elicit strands of gossip seemingly out of the air. But right now, more pressing even than his natural anxiety to know exactly what had happened and to whom, Mr. MacEwan felt a deep and urgent need just to talk to another human being.

"Oh, Mr. MacEwan," gasped Mrs. Bassett the moment she'd got her ample self inside the door. "Have you heard what happened?"

"I saw a little from the window. It was—suicide?"

"Oh, yes." She unpinned her hat and placed it with her purse carefully on a shelf in the hall closet. "No doubt about that—no doubt at all."

"Who—" Mr. MacEwan was almost afraid to ask. "Who was it?"

"Well, you'll never believe it." She shook her head slowly as though she still couldn't quite believe it herself. "Little Mrs. Kummer next door."

"Oh, no!"

Mr. MacEwan's and the Kummers' were corner apartments, the only two on the floor that opened onto the stair landing, which set them a little apart from their other neighbors and lent their occupants a spurious proximity. But it was not mere proximity that had caused Mr. MacEwan to overlook Celeste Kummer in his gloomy speculations.

She had always seemed such a

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light-hearted little woman, happily and totally wrapped up in the fascinating business of self-adornment, with never a problem that couldn't be solved by a new dress, a new trinket, a new hairdo; and blessed, moreover, with a husband whose single-minded joy in life was to see to it that she lacked for nothing. For all the fifteen years they'd lived next door, Stanley Kummer had, quite cheerfully, come home from his daytime job, grabbed a few hours of sleep then spent a good part of the night delivering bundles of a morning newspaper to dealers around the city.

"You're right," Mr. MacEwan said at last rather shakily. "I can't believe it."

"It's true though," Mrs. Bassett stated grimly, tying on her apron as she marched out to the kitchen, Mr. MacEwan following sadly behind. She came to an abrupt stop when she saw the cup and saucer still sitting on the table.

"Oh, now, Mr. MacEwan! Is that all you had for breakfast? And it doesn't look like you even touched that."

"There was so much excitement —" he explained distractedly.

"Well, you ought to have something. Life has to go on, you know." She poured the cold tea into the sink. "I'll make you a fresh cup and a nice poached egg to go with it."

Mr. MacEwan sat down meekly at the kitchen table and watched her move briskly between sink and stove with a determined back-to-normal clatter.

"I think I'll make me a pot of coffee while I'm at it," she went on. "This thing's upset me so."

"Does Stanley know yet?" Mr. MacEwan asked.

"Yes." She sighed as she clapped a lid over the egg in the pan and began to measure coffee into the percolator. "He was just coming in from work—that night job of his—and Mr. Radovic had to tell him. I must say he took it pretty well—didn't go to pieces or anything like that. Just looked kind of dazed. Of course I don't know how he'll be when it really hits him. I was so glad David was there. Such a nice level-headed young man. He brought Mr. Kummer straight up to his apartment. I rode up in the elevator with them. It was kind of awkward—a person just doesn't know what to say. One of the policemen and some detective fellow came along. Wanted to ask some questions and look around. Seems a shame to bother the poor man at a time like this but—well, I guess they have to do their job."

She turned down the fire under the perking coffee, slid the finished egg smoothly onto a piece of toast, and set it in front of Mr. MacEwan. Then she looked up as they heard several pairs of footsteps going up the stairs off the landing outside.

Mrs. Bassett nodded toward the sound. "That must be Mr. Radovic taking them up to the roof." She

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lowered her voice solemnly. "That's where they think she jumped from, you know. The Kummers don't have any window facing the court."

"Why, Mrs. Bassett!" The recollection took Mr. MacEwan by surprise. "That must be what woke me last night—early this morning really—about three o'clock."

"Ah-h—you heard it, too, then. Quite a few people down in the lobby were saying that something woke them just about that time. Of course, they never dreamed it was anything like this. But that's what it must have been all right. Well, a person falling from that distance would make quite a sound—even a little bit of a thing like Mrs. Kummer."

Mrs. Bassett bit her lip and sniffed a little as she turned out the fire and poured herself a cup of coffee. "Oh," she murmured, "it's just *too* awful to think about."

"But Mrs. Bassett." Mr. MacEwan was quite excited now. "I heard somebody walking up there last night."

Mrs. Bassett uttered a little gasp and nearly spilled her coffee as she sat down opposite him. "You mean you actually heard that poor soul! Oh, Mr. MacEwan, to think you might have—but, of course, you didn't know who it was or what she was planning to do. Well how could you?"

"No . . . no." Mr. MacEwan brushed aside her words impatiently. "I mean afterwards. It must have been the sound of her falling that woke me. And it was *after* that I heard the footsteps."

"After?" She looked at him rather blankly. "Well, I don't see how that could be. You must be mistaken."

"No," he maintained stubbornly, "I'm not mistaken. I did hear someone—after."

Mrs. Bassett shifted in her chair, and Mr. MacEwan knew even before she opened her mouth that he was about to be "reasoned with."

"Mr. MacEwan dear," she began kindly, "if there had been anyone else on the roof last night—though what anyone would be doing wandering around up there at that time of night I cannot imagine—but *if* there had been, then they would've tried to stop the woman, wouldn't they? And if they couldn't manage that, then they'd certainly have come down and wakened Mr. Radovic or called the police or something. You're not going to try to tell me anyone could see a thing like that and just come back down and calmly go to bed as though nothing had happened."

"No." Then, half thinking aloud, Mr. MacEwan added, "Unless—"

"Unless what?" Mrs. Bassett caught him up sharply.

"Well, suppose," he suggested carefully, "suppose Mrs. Kummer *didn't* jump. Suppose—someone pushed her. A person who had done that would take good care not to raise any alarm."

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Mrs. Bassett took a deep breath and folded her arms across the shelf of her bosom. "For shame, Mr. MacEwan," she said severely. "I just don't know where a nice old gentleman like you gets such awful notions." Then, with a long-suffering sigh, she amended, "Oh, yes I do though. It's those trashy detective stories you're always reading."

"I do not read trashy ones," he put in testily.

She dismissed this distinction with a wave of her hand. "Just tell me this, Mr. Hawkshaw MacEwan: exactly who do you think might have done such a thing?"

"Well, I don't know that, of course, but—"

"Of course you don't," she cut him off triumphantly. "Because there *isn't* any such a person. Why you could ask for blocks around and you wouldn't find a soul to say a word against Mrs. Kummer. She may not have done a whole lot of good in her life, but she certainly never did anyone any harm, now did she?"

"Not that I know of," he had to admit.

"Oh, Mr. MacEwan dear." Mrs. Bassett switched abruptly to an appeal to his better nature. "Isn't this a sad enough business as it is without your trying to make it into something worse?"

"I'm not trying to *make* it into anything," he protested. "I'm just trying to understand. Anyhow—" He paused for a moment thoughtfully. "Would it really be worse?" Then, as he caught the shocked look on Mrs. Bassett's face, he added, "For Stanley, I mean. Nothing can bring her back, of course. But—well suicide is so especially cruel, such a slap in the face. As though all his years of loving effort to make her happy hadn't meant anything at all."

Mrs. Bassett pushed her chair back and stood up, firmly dissociating herself from any complicated, depressing nonsense of this sort. "Well, I'd just keep this in mind if I was you. This building is full of policemen and detectives and goodness knows what all. They know what they're about and I'm sure that if there's anything out of the way, they'll find it. You understand what I'm getting at, Mr. MacEwan?"

"Oh, I think I do, Mrs. Bassett," he replied amiably. "It is your opinion that there will be no need for me to step into the case."

"All right, all right." She threw up her hands. "Have your little joke if you must. But I'm serious about this. You go around telling people about something you *think* you heard—wakened up out of a sound sleep in the middle of the night"—she stressed the words drily—"and you know what's going to happen? Oh, there's a few—there always are—who'll snatch at any bit of gossip and start up the biggest, ugliest rumors possible, which isn't going to make poor Mr. Kummer's load

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any easier to bear. But most people, Mr. MacEwan, most people will say—"

"Poor old Andy MacEwan, he's really lost his marbles at last."

"Well, people *can* be pretty nasty, don't forget it. And I'm sure," she added, cracking the whip ever so slightly, "your daughter wouldn't like it a bit if she knew you were going around making a fool of yourself."

"I shall certainly try," he assured her, "not to make a fool of myself."

"I just hope you mean that," she sighed, not altogether satisfied. Then she perked up as they heard footsteps on the stairs outside again. "Oh, they're coming back down. I want to catch Mr. Radovic if I can."

She bustled to the door and opened it, and from where he sat, Mr. MacEwan caught a glimpse of several policemen moving into the apartment next door. Then, after a brief exchange, Mrs. Bassett led her unwilling prize back into the kitchen.

"Morning, Mr. MacEwan." Mr. Radovic stood there, rocking back and forth on his heels uneasily.

"Good morning, Mr. Radovic. You've had a pretty full day already, haven't you?"

"Oh, Lord!" Mr. Radovic groaned and rolled his eyes.

"Why don't you sit down and have a cup of coffee?" Mrs. Bassett urged.

"Well, thanks just the same, Mrs. Bassett, but my wife's got breakfast waiting for me downstairs. I was just sitting down to it when Jose started banging on the door. He was the one who found her, you know. He was so upset we could hardly get any sense out of him. When he gets excited he forgets his English."

Mrs. Bassett observed the amenities with a sympathetic nod, then pressed quickly on to the matter uppermost in her mind. "Tell me, did the police find anything up on the roof?"

"Oh, yeah." Mr. Radovic relaxed a little and grew almost expansive now that it seemed clear he wasn't going to be bothered by a request for repairs on top of all his other headaches. "They found the place where it looks like she went over. One of the tiles along the top of the wall on the court side is pulled loose. I know for a fact it wasn't loose yesterday afternoon. I was up there patching the roof and I took a look around."

"Poor soul," Mrs. Bassett sighed. "What do you suppose ever got into her?"

"Beats me. She sure was the last person you'd think would do a thing like that, you know what I mean?"

"Oh, I do indeed. Why, Mr. MacEwan and I were just saying—" She broke off abruptly as she recalled what she and Mr. MacEwan *had* just been talking about and

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finished instead with a serviceable generality. "Well, I guess you just never know." She cast her eyes appropriately downward, then uttered a sharp, irritated gasp. "Oh, for land's sake! What's happened to my clean floor? Mr. Radovic, what-'ve you got on the bottom of your shoes?"

"Wha-what?" He nervously lifted his foot and inspected the sole of one shoe. "Oh, geez, I'm sorry, Mrs. Bassett. It's from the roof. That tar must not be quite dry yet." He looked at her in such abject apology that Mrs. Bassett had no choice but to relent a little.

"Oh, never mind," she said. "You didn't do it on purpose, after all. But you'd better clean those shoes off before you go tracking it around. That tar's mean stuff to get up, you know."

"Oh, I know, I know," he agreed eagerly and moved to the door on a kind of exaggerated tiptoe.

Mrs. Bassett followed him and as he gratefully made his escape, Mr. MacEwan saw David Kleinman come out of the Kummer apartment next door. He smiled and made himself a small private bet that Mrs. Bassett was about to snare her next source of information.

Right on cue, Mrs. Bassett uttered a glad cry. "David! Now, *you* have time for a cup of coffee, don't you?"

"Well," David hesitated, running his hand through his wrinkled-looking hair. "I won't say I couldn't use it. But it'll have to be a quick one," he added as he followed Mrs. Bassett into the apartment. "I didn't even get to shave before Mr. Radovic routed me out."

On the threshold of the kitchen she stopped him suddenly and asked, "You haven't been up on the roof, have you?"

"No." David looked puzzled. "I've been next door with Mr. Kummer. Why?"

"That's why." She pointed dramatically downward. "Mr. Radovic just tracked tar from the roof onto my nice clean floor."

"Oh, that's too bad." David sat down and grinned companionably at Mr. MacEwan as Mrs. Bassett whisked out a cup and saucer and poured the steaming coffee.

A strong rapport existed between this pleasant-faced, tired-eyed young man and the old one, each being peculiarly well situated to appreciate the other's predicament. Mr. MacEwan, for his part, never ceased to admire the patience and grace with which David steadfastly maintained his sovereignty of spirit in the face of the endless, loving onslaughts of his widowed mother.

Mrs. Bassett had got out a pail of water, scrub brush, and putty knife and was on her knees working away at the blemishes on "her" kitchen floor.

"You just go right ahead with your coffee," she said. "I want to get this stuff up before it dries on. Tell me," she asked, never pausing

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in her scraping and scrubbing, "how is Mr. Kummer?"

"Oh . . ." David stirred his coffee thoughtfully. "Not good, not bad. Just sits there not saying much. After the police finished talking to him I tried to get him to lie down. He's had no sleep, you know—he worked yesterday and most of the night, too. But he said no, he didn't feel tired, and no, he didn't want to take anything. I asked him if he wanted me to call his own doctor but he didn't want that either."

David shrugged. "I didn't seem to be doing much good, so I finally left. Anyhow, I have to be over at the hospital by ten. I don't know though, I don't feel too easy about leaving him that way. I suppose the police will be in and out for a while yet. But after that—" David frowned. "Has he got any relatives, do you know?"

Mrs. Bassett looked up for a minute. "Just that brother of his. What's his name? Carl, isn't it?"

Mr. MacEwan nodded.

"Don't know how much help he'd be, though," she went on. "He just turns up now and then—mostly when he needs money, I'd guess. I have the impression he's kind of a drifter—never does seem to get settled in any one job. Anyways, I haven't seen him around for quite a while."

"Oh, I did." Mr. MacEwan suddenly remembered. "Just yesterday."

"Why—" Mrs. Bassett's mouth dropped open in innocent astonishment that anyone could have escaped her eagle eye. "*I* never saw him."

"It was after you'd left for the day," Mr. McEwan quickly assured her. "A little after five o'clock. I met him in the lobby as I was going out for a walk. He was looking very fit and prosperous, as a matter of fact. Had a wonderful tan. Said he just got in from Florida."

Mrs. Bassett sniffed. "How come he isn't here then?" She was clearly put out with Carl for having sneaked in behind her back, so to speak. "I thought he always stayed with them when he was in town. Though maybe," she took a final dig at him, "if he's doing as well as you say, he finally got a place of his own. And high time."

"There isn't anyone else?" David asked.

"Not so far as I know," Mrs. Bassett replied. "Mr. Kummer told me once they lost their folks when they were both quite young. The boys were raised by an aunt. But she passed away, too—oh, just a little more'n a month ago, wasn't it? I remember Mr. Kummer took off from work and they went to the funeral. Besides, she wouldn't have been any help. She was an invalid —spent her last years in a private nursing home upstate somewheres. Quite a nice place, Mr. Kummer said, and it wasn't any burden on them because she had money of her own. In fact, I think the Kummers

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had some expectations from that quarters."

She paused to think that over for a minute. "Now, that's another funny thing, isn't it? I mean, Mrs. Kummer doing away with herself just when they had prospects of some real money coming in. Far be it from me to speak ill of the dead, but there's no getting around it, that little lady did love to spend money. Well," she shook her head and resumed her scrubbing, "I guess it's one of those things we never will understand."

For several minutes Mr. MacEwan had been speculatively eyeing the door which Mrs. Bassett had left ajar when she and David came in. Now, with Mrs. Bassett safely bent over her work and David earnestly discussing with her what could be done about Mr. Kummer, Mr. MacEwan slipped out of his chair and went quietly into the hall and out the door.

A young patrolman had just come out of the Kummers' apartment. He was not, Mr. MacEwan realized regretfully, anyone really in charge, but he was the nearest thing to Authority within easy reach and he would have to do.

"Officer," Mr. MacEwan began, and his voice trembled infuriatingly with the need to say what he had to say before Mrs. Bassett got on his trail. "I must tell you this. About three o'clock this morning I was wakened by a sound—I think now it was Mrs. Kummer falling."

"Oh, yes, sir," said the young man brightly. "Several people have reported that." Then, as though not wanting to offend Mr. MacEwan he added generously, "I'll take your name, of course, sir. It's always good to have corroboration." And he brought out a new-looking notebook and wasted precious minutes painstakingly getting Mr. MacEwan's name spelled right.

"But what I wanted to tell you," Mr. MacEwan pressed on anxiously, "is that after I was wakened—*after* she fell—I heard someone walking on the roof."

"After, sir?" The young man looked politely skeptical. "You're sure it was after?"

"Yes." Mr. MacEwan had to strain to keep his voice patiently controlled. "Yes, I'm certain it was after."

They stood looking at each other across the abyss of years and Mr. MacEwan didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the picture of himself he saw reflected in the young man's expression: a little old man, probably hard of hearing, given to who-knows-what senile imaginings and, above all, burning, in the wake of a tragedy, with the universal human fever to play the Important Witness.

And just then, as though to crown the antic hopelessness of the situation, he heard Mrs. Bassett's voice behind him.

"*Mr.* MacEwan," she said sternly. "What *are* you up to?"

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It was quite useless to protest and he let himself be led ignominiously back to the kitchen, preferring not to see the knowing look that must have passed between Mrs. Bassett and the patrolman.

Mrs. Bassett, her floor now restored to its former spotlessness, plumped herself down on a chair between him and David. "Honestly, Mr. MacEwan," she fumed. "Can't I let you out of my sight for a minute? I thought it was understood you weren't going to spread that story around."

"I wasn't spreading it around," Mr. MacEwan rallied gamely. "I was just—" then the recollection of that fruitless exchange doused his little flare of spirit, and he finished, barely above a whisper—"reporting it to the authorities."

"What's this all about?" David looked from one to the other in bewilderment.

"Oh-h, I guess it's all right to tell *you*," Mrs. Bassett grumbled, and she proceeded to give David her own highly deprecating version of those sounds in the night. "So he's got this bee in his bonnet," she wound up, "that maybe somebody *murdered* Mrs. Kummer. Now I ask you, did you ever hear of anything so foolish?"

With practiced ease David managed to remain both respectful and quite deaf to her invitation to scorn. He kept his glance trained sympathetically on Mr. MacEwan for a moment. Then, gently, he asked (*et tu,* David?), "Are you sure it was *after,* Mr. MacEwan?"

"Yes David." Mr. MacEwan nodded wearily. "I'm sure it was after."

David stared down at the table in troubled silence. "Well. The thing is," he said at last, avoiding Mr. MacEwan's eye as he reluctantly spoke the traitorous words, "they found a note. On her dressing table."

"A suicide note?" Mrs. Bassett gasped.

David shrugged unhappily. "I don't know how else you could take it."

"Oh, David, what did it say?" Mrs. Bassett could barely contain herself.

"I'm not sure I'm supposed to—" David hesitated, then weakened. "Well, they didn't say *not* to. It was nothing personal or anything like that. It just said, 'Dear Stanley, I hope some day you'll be able to forgive me for what I'm going to do.' "

When it became apparent that he wasn't going to go on, Mrs. Bassett asked, "Well, didn't she say *why?*"

"No. That's all there was. No signature or anything. But they had Mr. Kummer get out some of her handwriting, and I suppose they'll have some expert compare them. But they looked like the same writing to me—kind of fancy, you know? A lot of little swirls and things."

"Oh, yes." Mrs. Bassett nodded sagely. "I've seen it many a time on

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notes she put on the door for deliverymen. She wrote a very elegant hand, Mrs. Kummer did." Then, with a sad dignity befitting this sobering but satisfying confirmation of her views, she said, "Well now, Mr. MacEwan. What do you have to say to *that?*"

Mr. MacEwan was spared the necessity of replying when David chose this moment to look at his watch and clap his hand to his head.

"Nine thirty already! I've got to go," he said as he rose noisily from the table. "Thank you for the coffee, Mrs. Bassett." He gripped Mr. MacEwan's hand briefly in mute apology and went to the door where he paused a moment. "Look," he said, "could you maybe stop in after a while and just see how Mr. Kummer is getting along?"

"Why, of course, David," Mrs. Bassett agreed quickly.

"I'd feel better. Maybe you can find out how to get in touch with his brother—just so he isn't left all by himself."

"Don't you worry now. I'll see to it." Then as he ducked out the door, she called after him, "My regards to your mother."

Mrs. Bassett rose and carried the dishes over to the sink. "Such a nice boy," she went on warmly. "Though how he stays so thin with all that rich food Sadie's always stuffing into him—probably has indigestion half the time. What I always say is, there's nothing beats good plain cooking."

Her voice rattled on in accompaniment to the clatter of the dishwashing and Mr. MacEwan, who'd heard her grind this ax too many times before, got up and started out of the kitchen.

"Mr. MacEwan, you know what I think I'll do," she said suddenly, stopping him at the door. "I think I'll see if Mr. Kummer won't come over here for a while. Maybe I can persuade him to have a bit of lunch with us. That is, if it's all right with you?"

"Perfectly all right, Mrs. Bassett. Though he may not feel much like eating."

"Well, he's more likely to eat a little something with us than all by himself. And, believe me, there's no trouble so bad it doesn't seem worse on an empty stomach." Fired with zeal, she popped the last dish in the drainer, dried her hands, and took off her apron. "I'm going over right now. I shouldn't be long."

As soon as the door closed behind her, Mr. MacEwan walked into the living room and sat down in the chair by the window, thankful for a little time to himself so that he could think back over his early morning experience without being confused by other people telling him what they thought he must have heard. One thing, at least, he was certain of, and he mentally checked it off with a wry smile: whatever he'd heard or thought he heard, it had been "after."

But—was it possible—was it just

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possible that he *had* been half dreaming, overlaying some sound remembered from another time on his uneasy wakefulness?

In recent years, even wide-awake, his mind *did* play strange tricks on him. With no trouble at all, for instance, he could call up—so vividly that it startled him—the hated face of Georgie Stubbs who'd made the four-block walk to school such a hell when they were both in the third grade; and yet—sometimes—the dear, familiar features of his own Bessie faded so from memory that he was forced, to his shame, to go into the bedroom and look once again at her picture standing on the dresser.

He closed his eyes now and tried as earnestly and honestly as he could to recall exactly what he'd felt and heard at three o'clock this morning. And faintly but surely there came back to him the sound of those footsteps overheard; *not* the careless tread of someone going about his daytime business, but footsteps peculiar to that unhealthy hour, footsteps trying not to be heard.

He opened his eyes with relief, his sorely tried confidence in his own senses restored. Why, he might even think of a way, he was encouraged to hope, to find out exactly what *had* become of Carl Kummer since yesterday afternoon. It was a matter about which he now found himself increasingly curious.

He sat for a few minutes longer, watching the progress of a tiny tug pulling a seemingly impossible number of loaded barges down the sun-sparkled river. Then, as the apartment door opened and he heard Mrs. Bassett's voice, all bustling encouragement, he got up and walked back down the hall.

Stanley Kummer was standing just inside the door, and except for the stubble beginning to show darkly along his jaw, his appearance seemed little changed. His head displayed its usual tendency to wobble slightly as though it were insecurely attached to his scrawny neck, and his large hands hung down at his sides like two burdens pulling his shoulders into a permanent slope.

Mr. MacEwan grasped one of the limp hands and pressed it. "Stanley," he said, "I'm so sorry."

"You're very kind," mumbled Stanley, blinking his pale eyes. "Everyone is so kind."

"Now then, Mr. Kummer," Mrs. Bassett cut in with relentless cheer. "I think the first thing you ought to do is sit down and have a nice cup of coffee."

"Oh, really I—" Stanley began feebly.

Ignoring his protests, Mrs. Bassett steered him into the kitchen and sat him down at the table. As she turned the fire on under the coffee pot she nodded with vigorous significance to Mr. MacEwan who obediently settled himself in the chair opposite.

"What I'm going to do," she nat-

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tered on, busily assembling cup and saucer and cream and sugar in front of Stanley, "is run over to the supermarket and get a few things for our lunch." She poured Stanley's coffee, then swept out of the kitchen, only to reappear a few minutes later pinning on her hat, with her purse dangling from one arm.

"I won't be long," she assured them as she started out, then added archly, "Just you boys behave yourselves now."

For some minutes after she'd left the two men sat engulfed in a silence born equally of relief and awkwardness. Stanley stared into his cup, stirring and stirring as though it were some job he had to do.

"Stanley," Mr. MacEwan ventured at last. "We were wondering —do you know where to locate your brother?"

The spoon jerked sharply against the cup, slopping coffee into the saucer, and Stanley uttered a harsh, dry laugh. "Carl," he said, "is in the land of milk and honey." Then he explained tonelessly, "He's gone to Florida to live."

"But—" Mr. MacEwan felt a little pulse of excitment stir in him. "I met him yesterday—down in the lobby—just after five o'clock."

Stanley stared at Mr. MacEwan in blank wonder. "He *was* here then. I thought—"

"You didn't see him?" Mr. MacEwan prodded him gently.

"No. No, I didn't come back for dinner last night. Mr. Carter wanted me to finish up something, so I stayed late and just went on to my other job from there." He sighed. "Maybe—if I had come home then . . ." He closed his eyes. Then, suddenly, with leaden conviction, he announced, "This was all Carl's doing."

"What—" Mr. MacEwan could barely get the words out. "What do you mean by that, Stanley?"

With what seemed a tremendous effort Stanley lifted his heavy eyelids and looked at Mr. MacEwan again. "Oh," he said, "he's a great talker, Carl is. Every time he'd come to us he'd go on about all the places he'd been to, all the things he'd done. He couldn't have done anywhere near all that—he never had anything, never kept anything. And I think—in a way—Celeste knew it, but still—after he'd left she'd always be so unhappy, so discontented for a while. He made our life seem so poor."

Stanley paused and swallowed and his great knob of an Adam's apple jumped alarmingly. "He was always like that, even when we were boys. He could almost make you believe things you'd know couldn't be so. He'd do things—Aunt Marjorie'd get so mad at him—and yet he could always sweet-talk his way out of it. He was Aunt Marjorie's favorite—even then. I guess—she just couldn't help herself."

He thought about that for a min-

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ute. Then his face darkened. "Even so," his voice rose, "even so, it wasn't fair!" And he brought his hands flat down on the table with such force that the china bounced.

He pushed himself up from the table and began to stride up and down the kitchen in great agitation. "*I* was the one who got her settled in the nursing home. *I* was the one who went up to see her every week —every week—all the years she was there. Carl never wrote, never went near her—except that one time. But that was enough. She left everything to him."

Stanley came back to the table and gripped the back of the chair till his big knuckles showed white. He almost shouted at Mr. MacEwan, "Was that fair?"

Mr. MacEwan shook his head numbly, sick with shame for having let his curiosity pry open this Pandora's box of private miseries. And all—all just to try to prove his own little ego-gratifying point. For a moment he could not even remember what it was any more.

"Stanley," he said helplessly. "Oh, Stanley, sit down."

Stanley slumped back into his chair. But almost immediately he leaned forward and began talking again with feverish earnestness. "It wasn't for myself, you understand. I didn't care about the money. But Celeste counted on it so. She loved nice things." He said this last with simple pride, as if it had been a special virtue in her.

"After the first disappointment though," he went on, "I thought it might even work out for the best. If Carl had money, at least he wouldn't be bothering us any more. But Celeste just wouldn't leave it at that. She kept writing to him. I tried to get her to stop. I didn't want—" He gulped. "I didn't want her to make a fool of herself."

Perhaps, and Mr. MacEwan tried hard to believe it, it was doing Stanley some sort of good to talk, to get things off his chest. But the sight of a man torturing himself with this futile rehashing of painful events was more than Mr. MacEwan could bear. He turned his eyes for relief to the ceiling, the stove, the floor—

And there his glance riveted. His mind seemed to come to a full stop, unable, unwilling to take in what he saw there. The length of the floor where Stanley had paced up and down bore traces of the same ugly black marks that Mrs. Bassett had scrubbed off a short time before.

Mr. MacEwan finally pulled his eyes up from the floor and looked at his neighbor as though seeing him for the first time. "Why, Stanley," he said, sadly certain, "it was you I heard on the roof last night."

Stanley stopped talking and stared at Mr. MacEwan rather stupidly. Then he took a deep breath and let it out in a long racking sigh.

"I didn't come home at dinner time," he began reciting dully, "and it got quite cool later in the evening.

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So after I'd delivered about half the papers I decided to stop back here and get my heavier jacket. Celeste was still up. She was sitting at the dressing table writing something. She looked so pretty."

Even now—through all the layers of despair—there flickered briefly in Stanley's eyes some little tag end of pleasure at the recollection.

Then all expression drained out of them again and he went on. "I couldn't understand why she was so upset to see me. Then I saw her suitcases standing there. She said she was writing me a note, but since I was here she might just as well tell me. She said—she said she was going to Florida to be with Carl. I thought—I still thought she was just imagining that he wanted her to come. Even when she said he'd been here I didn't really believe it. I guess I didn't want to believe it. She got very impatient with me and said she was going to have some fun out of life and I couldn't stop her. And then she said—"

Stanley closed his eyes tight with the effort to squeeze out those final, hurtful words, "She said—'Oh, go peddle your papers.'

"I slapped her," he went on dully. "I never struck Celeste before in my life. But I slapped her—hard. She lost her balance and fell back against the dressing table and slid down to the floor. I started to the bathroom to get some water to bring her around. Then I looked down at her and—I don't know—all those years—it seemed such a waste, such a waste."

He stiffened in his chair and said fiercely, "All of a sudden I just wanted to clear everything away, out of my sight. I unpacked her suitcases and stuffed everything back in the drawers. And I carried her up to the roof and—put her out of my sight, too."

He winced painfully at the memory. But his next words were chillingly matter-of-fact. "Then I came back down and got my jacket and made the rest of the deliveries." He sat silent for a minute, then there came out of him something that sounded grotesquely like a giggle. "That's why," he finished inanely, "I was late getting home from work this morning."

Into the deathly stillness that followed, Mrs. Bassett suddenly burst, profuse with apologies and explanations.

"I never in the world meant to be this long. But my land! The lines at that supermarket—" She saw Stanley then, his head in his hands. "Why, Mr. Kummer, whatever—Mr. MacEwan, what's going on here?"

Mr. MacEwan shook his head warningly at her as he rose. "Not now, Mrs. Bassett," he said quietly, and something in his face and the tone of his voice impressed even Mrs. Bassett into silence. "Are the police still next door?" he asked her.

"Why—yes," she replied uncertainly. "Some of them anyways."

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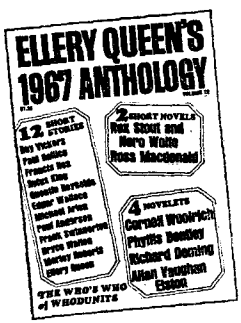
"I think," Mr. MacEwan said, placing his hand gently on Stanley's shoulder, "Mr. Kummer has something he wants to say to them."

The cruel day dragged finally to a close and Mr. MacEwan, once more alone, lowered himself gratefully into his old chair by the window—just in time to watch the sun, a perfect, distinct globe of orange, drop swiftly from sight behind the Palisades.

Well, then. He had heard what he'd thought he heard and it had meant much more than he'd bargained for. What small satisfaction he might have gleaned from the memory of Mrs. Bassett, for once subdued and solicitous, was quite cancelled out by the thought of the Kummers' apartment, standing silent and empty now.

Mr. MacEwan sighed and, as so often before, he looked to the river for solace. In the dusk, with the lights winking on along the shore, it glistened calm and fair, never more truly "our lordly Hudson, hardly flowing." The sight settled over him like a beneficence, and when, at length, he rose to go to bed, he did so content in the knowledge that it would be waiting for him outside his window tomorrow.



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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

For reasons never made clear, Dashiell Hammett opposed the hardcover collection of his short stories and novelets, while permitting Ellery Queen to edit a magnificent set of 9 paperbacks which Queen has described, quite accurately, as "the most important series of detective-crime short stories of our time." (For a complete bibliography of these and all Hammett books, see the 9th in Queen's series, A MAN NAMED THIN, Mercury Mystery 233, 1962). Now at last, 5 years after Hammett's death, Lillian Hellman has edited THE BIG KNOCKOVER (Random, $5.95), a generous volume (180,000 words) containing 9 stories from *Black Mask* about the Continental Op, plus a sensitive and moving memoir by Hellman and a long fragment of Hammett's unfinished but rewarding (and semi-autobiographical) "straight" novel, TULIP. This first hardcover Hammett collection is a superb one—and, one hopes, only the first of a superb series.

★★★★ **THREE GOTHIC NOVELS, *edited by E. F. Bleiler*** (Dover T1232, $2)

Stories by Horace Walpole, William Beckford and John Polidori (plus a fragment by Byron), with excellent historico-critical notes to give us a true understanding of the pre-feminine gothic.

★★★★ **THE SECRET SOLDIER, *by John Quigley*** (New American Library, $4.95)

Novelistically meaty and meaningful story of the drab, sordid lower depths of international intrigue in Formosa.

★★★★ **DIE RICH DIE HAPPY, *by James Munro*** (Knopf, $4.95)

Vivid, spectacular, yet acute spy story—long, but with plot and action enough for two novels.

★★★★ **HIS WEIGHT IN GOLD, *by Maurice Procter*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Fine counterpoint of police and criminal procedure in tracing £500,000 loot; one of Chief Inspector Martineau's best cases.

★★★★ **I SEE YOU, *by Charlotte Armstrong*** (Coward-McCann, $4.50)

9 stories depicting the ages of man (and woman): some criminous (from EQMM), some "straight," almost all magical.

(*Continued on next page*)

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Fact-crime dept.: John Godwin's KILLERS IN PARADISE (Hart, 75¢) contains 9 true cases, 1931-60, set in exotic locales, 8 of them completely unhackneyed, including several (largely Australian) which deserve to become classics. (You will not soon forget the epic of the bush outlaw Nemarluk and the aboriginal tracker Bul Bul, which is worthy of Arthur Upfield.) Philip Marsden's IN PERIL BEFORE PARLIAMENT (Roy, $5.95) relates 9 trials, 1649-1901, before Great Britain's legislature, for murder, blasphemy, bigamy and other trespasses, each of them a wonderful social illumination of its period.

★★★ **STALEMATE, *by Evelyn Berckman*** (Crime Club, $3.95)

Firm, subtle, convincing revisitation of the murder-swapping theme of STRANGERS ON A TRAIN.

★★★ **AT SOME FORGOTTEN DOOR, *by Doris Miles Disney*** (Crime Club, $4.50)

Conventional gothica, set in Connecticut in the 1880's, executed with lively readability and a fine grisly finale.

★★★ **MURDER SPINS THE WHEEL, *by Brett Halliday*** (Dell 6123, 45¢)

Clever plot about fixing sports events, extremely tight action, unexpected farce elements . . . and Michael Shayne.

★★★ **FERAMONTOV, *by Desmmond Cory*** (Walker, $4.50)

Johnny Fedora on the loose in Spain again, which means copious carnage, shrewd surprises, elaborate plotting and fast movement.

★★★ **A DOOR FELL SHUT, *by Martha Albrand*** (New American Library, $4.95)

A great violinist becomes an involuntary spy in a novel of East and West Berlin which is probably Miss Albrand's best.

★★★ **HIGH WATER AT FOUR, *by Jerrard Tickell*** (Doubleday, $4.50)

Gentle, unsurprising, fresh and likable adventure story of rescue from Albanian Red captivity.

007-and Bacon dept.: Bill Adler's DEAR 007 (Simon & Schuster, $2.50) is a collection of fan mail to James Bond, largely at once outrageous and convincingly funny, amusingly illustrated by Paul Bacon. All much more entertaining than Ian Fleming's OCTOPUSSY (New American Library, $3.50), two negligible short stories, partially redeemed by the unusually good book design and the illustrations—again by Paul Bacon and in quite a different vein.

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a NEW short story by
URSULA CURTISS

In which Ursula Curtiss combines sociology, gerontology, and criminology—and at a time when we are paying so much attention to our Senior Citizens, this combination of themes is surprisingly fresh . . .

GOOD NEIGHBOR

by URSULA CURTISS

MRS. GLASS ADVANCED ON THE house across the road with the measureless aplomb of a woman who has been mastering Cub Scouts, school committees, and minor civic officials for years.

It was a small old house, adobe, settled under cottonwood trees as naturally as a toadstool and, in Mrs. Glass's opinion, as unhealthily. She noted with a kind of grim satisfaction that the arch-topped front door, weathered to the color of driftwood, had neither knocker nor bell.

Well, that was symbolic. These neglected old people shrank into the shell of their own hurt, and sometimes, even for Mrs. Glass, who had worked with Senior Citizens, it was very hard to get them out.

She used her knuckles on the door, smartly, and turned to contemplate her own domain across the way.

Gas lanterns, flickering invisibly in the morning sunlight, flanked a wide crushed-stone drive with its antiqued-wood sign: Griffin Acres. They were quarter acres, really, but beautifully landscaped around the expensive brand-new homes. This was no warren of a development; the houses—some trimmed with redwood, others with stone—faced each other at tactful angles.

Mrs. Glass's was the first on the right as you drove in. When the flaming-orange gas tank in the distance was repainted a soft green—as the developers had promised—you would hardly know it was there. Mrs. Glass gazed and marveled; it was difficult to believe that only six months ago Griffin Acres had been trees and fields and cawing crows.

She turned back to the door and had just lifted her hand to rap again when it opened. A small elderly woman with piled white hair and penetrating hazel eyes—the eyes of a girl, almost—said instantly, "I don't use cosmetics, as you see, and I never read magazines. I say this," the white head tipped

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disarmingly, "so as not to waste your time or mine."

Mrs. Glass took a moment to comprehend; then, as the door began a courteous waver in her direction, she laughed cheerfully. "Oh, *I* see. You are Mrs. Corey? I'm Stella Glass, your neighbor across the way, and I'm not selling a thing. I just came over to say hello."

Fleetingly, Mrs. Corey appeared to think that this had been accomplished, but then she widened the door again and said politely, "It's very kind of you. Won't you come in, Mrs. Glass?"

Mrs. Glass went in. She was consumed with curiosity about this poor old soul whom nobody ever visited, and who quite openly played solitaire or read at a table to the right of the front door. Like many Southwesterners, Mrs. Glass was as direct about another woman's house as a child would be about another child's toys, and she glanced about her with undisguised keenness.

Two glimmers caught her eye at once, almost as imperatively as lighted lamps in the long shadowy room. One was a silver—muffin-warmer, might it be?—on a low bookcase. With its fluted halves closed it would look like a giant seashell on legs; at the moment they were open flat and filled with pansies. The other was a massive gilded eagle glowing coldly from the fireplace mantelpiece at the far end of the room. The cruel profile, the half-hunched wings, the spread talons looked menacing even in frozen metal.

Mrs. Glass, who kept flowers in vases where they belonged, was somewhat confused by the silver object; she felt on firmer ground with the eagle, whose likeness she had seen reproduced in miniature on mirror tops. "Now I'll just bet that's old Colonial," she said, sidling closer and gazing up.

Mrs. Corey replied that it was—very old, in fact. After a nonplussed moment or two she invited her visitor to sit down.

Mrs. Glass did. Her blotter-like gaze had by this time absorbed a number of other things in the room; and now, added to her conviction that it was dangerous as well as pitiable for anyone to lead a hermit-like existence, there was a feeling she did not quite like to recognize. Mrs. Glass was impressed.

In the course of the next ten minutes she gouged from her hostess the facts that she was a widow, had spent her youth in the east, and—this came out very restrainedly—yes, she thought Griffin Acres attractive. Different, of course, from open fields across the main road.

"You must come and see our house," said Mrs. Glass, having led her dexterously into this trap. "I have coffee on at all hours, and I know you'll like my neighbor next door, Helen Spenlow. She's

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from the east too. I'll bet you have all kinds of mutual friends."

A curious look flitted across Mrs. Corey's face. With a practised gesture that somehow startled Mrs. Glass she lit a cigarette, and when she had finished it she began tentative rising motions. "It was very kind of you to call, Mrs. Glass, and now I wonder if you'll excuse me? I work in the mornings, you know."

Mrs. Glass gaped.

"I'm writing my memoirs," said Mrs. Corey.

"Of course they get that way—how can they help it?" said Mrs. Glass to Helen Spenlow. "But apart from the memoirs business she's quite bright, really, and quite intelligent. It's just a matter of getting her out and *meeting* people. Leave it to me . . ."

On the following day she knocked again on Mrs. Corey's door. When it was opened she said heartily, "Got a coat handy? I've come to take you for a drive."

"Drive?" repeated Mrs. Corey. She looked astounded, as though automobiles had crept upon the century without her knowing it. "Where?"

"Anywhere." Mrs. Glass made a large gesture. "It's a beautiful day, much too nice to waste indoors, and you must have some marketing to do—I know I have. Come on. Do you good."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Corey, and now she looked almost frightened. "Thank you, but no. I have my work, you see."

"It won't run away," said Mrs. Glass indulgently.

A faint color appeared on the high papery cheekbones. "To tell you the truth, Mrs. Glass, I very seldom go out. I do not enjoy going out. I am very good company for myself. Besides," added Mrs. Corey with the weakness of courtesy, "I'm not feeling very well."

Not feeling very well, reflected Mrs. Glass as she retraced her steps on the overgrown path, and all alone in a house with no telephone. (She had checked.) That *was* dangerous. Suppose the old lady had a bad fall, or a heart attack? She looked hardy enough, but those were the very ones who went like a snap of the fingers.

Mrs. Glass at once set about making her a bland pudding.

That was on Wednesday. On Thursday it rained—a soft blowy rain that looked occasionally like snow because of the petals it swept from the apple and cherry trees across the road. Mrs. Glass, gazing idly out of the front window in her snug living room, was horrified to see the small sturdy figure of Mrs. Corey at work on the neglected lawn with—was it a hoe?

How the old seemed to court death! It might be understandable in a way, but it certainly was not

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Christian, and Mrs. Glass hastened into a raincoat and scarf and crossed the glistening street. In contrast to the neat and sensible crushed-stone and cactus which made up most of the landscaping of Griffin Acres, Mrs. Corey's efforts consisted of a wild-looking iris bed and daffodils scattered as untidily as broken pearls.

"My dear Mrs. Corey!" panted Mrs. Glass. "You'll catch your death of cold out here in the rain, really you will!"

Mrs. Corey, poising the hoe, gave her a penetrating look from under her white hair, wet and wispy at the moment but still piled as haughtily as though she were on her way to the theater. "I like being outdoors in the rain, Mrs. Glass. I'm very strong."

And she did indeed cut at the damp earth between the iris with a force that threatened the hoe handle. "Then you must let me help you," said Mrs. Glass firmly. "Let's see, have you got a trowel, or one of those little hand cultivators?"

Mrs. Corey gazed in silence at her erratic iris bed, and Mrs. Glass noted with a pang of compassion that the small face looked suddenly pinched to the bone. "I believe you're right," said Mrs. Corey in an exhausted voice. "I will go in after all. Oh, no—please, it's perfectly all right. I have a fire in the living room and I'll change my shoes at once . . ."

But on Friday, Mrs. Glass's protective eye noted, the old lady did not appear outside at all, not even after the mail truck made one of its squeaky infrequent pauses at her box. Moreover, the window where she had often been seen playing solitaire was curtained, as though for an invalid's repose.

By two o'clock Mrs. Glass could stand it no longer. Scarfed and coated against the buffeting wind, she crossed the street, walked up the path, and knocked on the front door.

To another ear the utter silence inside might have had the quality of an animal's freezing in its burrow. To Mrs. Glass it represented the kind of natural disaster for which neighbors had been created. She knocked twice more, and when she had put her mouth close to the crack and called "Mrs. Corey?" without getting any response, she began to circle the little house anxiously.

One curtained window after another confronted her, and complete stillness answered all her taps and calls. This, thought Mrs. Glass with the beginnings of indignation, was what came of elderly people shutting themselves off alone. Where were they then, when illness struck them, or serious injury?

She had become so inured to the thwarting folds of the curtains that she only realized belatedly that here, at the back of the house, was a sliver where they did not quite

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meet, and she was looking at movement inside the room.

It was a very small sliver, giving on a radiance that could only be lamplight. By squeezing one eye shut and concentrating fiercely with the other, Mrs. Glass could see a hand, unmistakably Mrs. Corey's, holding a lighted cigarette. While she watched, the hand lifted and the exhaled smoke came fuming down; then the cigarette was extended to an ashtray that was out of sight.

Mrs. Glass tiptoed away, although the wind that had undoubtedly smothered all her tappings and callings would have done the same for her footsteps. She felt much like a missionary at the sight of a leaping cannibal—shocked but infinitely compassionate.

It was quite evident what had happened. Abandoned to utter solitude, confronted for who-knew-how-many years by empty echoing fields, the poor woman had begun to lose her hold on reality. The very lack of another human voice would take its toll. Consider her fright at the notion of being taken for a drive, and her pathetic, "I do not enjoy going out. I am very good company for myself."

Griffin Acres had certainly come along just in time.

From then on, Mrs. Glass devoted herself unflaggingly to enticing Mrs. Corey out of her shell. She could not enlist her husband, who was taciturn and unhelpful, and her new friends, the Spenlows, had left on a vacation. In spite of the fact that Griffin Acres rang with the shrieks of children, the only young mother Mrs. Glass could get hold of, a Mrs. Demarest, said in a bemused way when told of the sociological problem across the street, "You mean she lives absolutely alone? Not another soul? How marvelous."

On the day after her eerie seclusion, Mrs. Corey, looking reassuringly normal, walked out to her mailbox, and Mrs. Glass was instantly there with a cake. To polite demurs about doctors and diets Mrs. Glass said robustly, "There's nothing in this to harm a fly. It will do you good, really it will. Oh, don't bother about that old plate—I'll just pick it up some day when I'm by. No, honestly, I must run now."

On the day after that, Mrs. Glass was struck by a thought which should have occurred to her before. Mrs. Corey was lonely for someone of her own generation—of course! Someone to reminisce with, someone in her own position. Another widow.

Mrs. Glass's Aunt Mildred was considerably older than Mrs. Corey—Aunt Mildred was in her eighties, in fact, but she was a Senior Citizen of whom anybody could be proud. She belonged to the Matey Eighties and the Oldsters' Club, in which last she had won a hornpipe

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contest last Christmas, and she had never lost her zest for the world around her. She was interested in clothes, and how much things had cost, and were those your own teeth? She was really very droll, bless her heart. No one, Mrs. Glass felt, could remain in a shell around Aunt Mildred.

Accordingly, she drove up to the Heights and fetched her aunt down for the day. It was calm and sunny, with almost drinkably deep shadows under the fully leafed trees—a day to lure even Mrs. Corey out. And presently she came, or rather went; it was only Mrs. Glass's vigilance which detected the small figure emerging at the back of the house, carrying what seemed to be a folded lawn chair.

"Oh, Aunt Mildred," said Mrs. Glass brightly, turning from the window. "I have a neighbor I'd like you to meet."

It went, Mrs. Glass thought, wonderfully well. Mrs. Corey brought out two more lawn chairs and Tom Collinses, and they all sat under the big cottonwood tree and chatted. Or they did at first; gradually Aunt Mildred's drink sent her into a beatific nap out of which she started galvanically at intervals, crying sharply, "Who? What did you say?" and then subsided into sleep again.

Mrs. Corey observed her thoughtfully. "What a remarkable woman," she said, and Mrs. Glass seized on this eagerly. "Isn't she? She gets so much out of life, even now. She's a little sleepy today—the drive, you know—but I can see she's taken to you. I think you two are going to be great friends. Yes, I'm sure you two—"

"Who?" demanded Aunt Mildred in a ratchety voice. "I heard what you said. I'm just—"

Her chin dropped again. Mrs. Corey smiled a little and rose. "I mustn't forget your cake plate," she said quietly, and went into the house.

Mrs. Glass roused her aunt, because the shadows were now lengthening, and they both thanked their hostess when she emerged with the cake plate. Mrs. Corey looked quite wistful at seeing them depart, thought Mrs. Glass triumphantly; indeed, her eyes, looking newly arched above and hollowed below, were almost sad. So soporific had the afternoon been that Mrs. Glass thought she heard her say, "It's self-defense"; but when she turned interrogatively, Mrs. Corey was gazing at the redwood wicker that enclosed Griffin Acres.

"A well-built fence," she said.

Mrs. Glass's aunt was much taken with Mrs. Corey. She was reminded, she said, of a girl at a debutante ball in Chicago—just those hazel eyes and that cut of cheek; but the girl she was thinking of had run off with a ne'er-do-well, although she was of a very promi-

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nent family, and nobody had ever heard of her again.

"I must have her up to meet the girls," she said, and armed with her aunt's invitation, Mrs. Glass proceeded to the house across the way.

Never slack your hand in the day of battle, Mrs. Glass thought, and surely a dent had been made in Mrs. Corey's armor of solitariness. Not for nothing had the old lady looked so pensive, not for nothing had she given Mrs. Glass that special recognizing glance.

The sky was piled with clouds, so dazzling and close that one of them seemed to be peeping right over Mrs. Corey's roof. "You must have ordered this cloud," Mrs. Glass would say whimsically, "because—come and see—it looks just like your hair."

She sounded her knuckles loudly on the door—and surely Mrs. Corey had squirrels, because something was making a little gravelly sound up there. She rapped again, proprietorily, and never knew what made her lift her gaze to the tiny overhang of roof above the door.

The metallic gleam above was not the brass lantern that usually hung through a hole cut in the weatherstained board; no, it was the great gilded iron eagle, its head revolving a little although the day was still. How very peculiar, thought Mrs. Glass as the downward rush began; that wasn't there yesterd—

NEXT MONTH . . .

SPECIAL *All Short Story* ISSUE!

10 *NEW* stories including—

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG's *A Matter of Timing*

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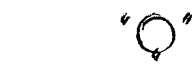

the *NEWEST* short novel by

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Winston Churchill once wrote: "Plot and counterplot, ruse and treachery, cross and double-cross, true agent false agent, gold and steel, the bomb and the dagger and the firing party—interwoven in a texture so intricate as to be incredible yet true. The high officers of the secret service revelled in these subterranean depths and pursued their task with cold and silent passion."

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A terrible and terrifying situation faced the Prime Minister. Imagine, if you will, the same situation in the United States, involving, say, members of the President's Cabinet . . .

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"If there's a job so disreputable that none of the departments will touch it . . . give it to 'E' Branch"—to Fortescue and Calder and Behrens, who don't know when or how to quit, or even the meaning of the word . . .

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"E" BRANCH: THE ELIMINATORS

by MICHAEL GILBERT

ON FRIDAY NIGHT COLONEL GEOFFREY Bax went down alone for a last visit to his week-end cottage in Sussex. It was a last visit because the cottage had been put up for sale. He was alone because his wife was escorting her mother on her summer pilgrimage to Torquay.

On Saturday morning the farmer drove up with milk and eggs, and discovered the Colonel. He was seated in the chair at the head of the kitchen table, under the still-burning electric light. It was a hot June morning, and the flies were already gathering round the pool of blackening blood on the table top. The gun which had killed the Colonel was in his right hand.

Mr. Behrens had known Colonel Bax. He read the news in his Sunday paper and walked up the hill to discuss it with his old friend, Mr. Calder.

"Yes. It's in my paper, too," said Mr. Calder. "I didn't really know Bax. Wasn't he working for D.I. 5?"

"Yes. He got a job with them when he retired from the Army. It wasn't anything hush-hush, you know. He did a lot of their positive vetting."

"I'd rather pick oakum," said Mr. Calder.

Positive vetting was a palliative devised by the government in 1952 after a series of security scandals. It meant, in practice, that any government servant who attained a certain degree of seniority had to supply the name of a "referee"; and it then became the duty of the positive vetter to interview the referee and inquire of him whether the employee concerned was reliable. The answer was always predictable.

"Most of those jobs went to officers who had been axed," said Mr. Behrens. "They got quite well paid for it. Add the salary to their service pensions and they could get by."

Mr. Calder looked up sharply. He had known Mr. Behrens long enough to ignore the plain meaning of what he said and jump to the thought behind it.

"Do you think there was some sort of pressure on Bax?"

"It's not impossible. The material was there. In his case it was a girl. Her parents were Poles. Geoffrey did them a good turn just after the war and was godfather to their little daughter."

"Daddy Longlegs," said Mr. Calder, scratching the head of his

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deerhound, Rasselas, who was stretched out under the breakfast table.

"It's all very well for you to sneer," said Mr. Behrens. "I've met the girl. She's very beautiful."

"Did Bax's wife know about her?"

"If she had, she'd have started divorce proceedings at once. She was that sort of woman."

"If she was that sort of woman, Bax would have been well rid of her."

"Then he'd have lost his job."

Mr. Calder, considering the matter, was inclined to agree. He knew that, in certain branches of the Security Services, martial irregularity was considered worse than crime and nearly as bad as ideological deviation.

"He could have lived on his pension."

"*And* paid alimony to his wife?"

"He wouldn't have starved," said Mr. Calder. "There was no need for him to blow his brains out. *That* didn't help."

"That cottage of his," said Mr. Behrens. "He was very fond of it. He often talked about it. He was going to retire there."

"So?"

"I can't help wondering why he had to sell it."

"You're making my flesh creep," said Mr. Calder. And from under the table Rasselas gave a brief snarl, just as if he had been following the whole conversation.

Her Majesty's Minister of State for Education, Dermot Nicholson, read the news in his elegant flat on Campden Hill.

He said to his sister, Norah, who had retired from the Vice-Principalship of an Oxford college to keep house for her brother and help write his speeches, "Colonel Geoffrey Bax. Do we know a Geoffrey Bax? The name seems familiar."

"Wasn't that the name of the man who was round here a few weeks ago, asking you a lot of questions?"

"Oh, was that the chap? I thought I'd heard the name somewhere."

"What *did* he want? Did you ever find out?"

"It was some sort of routine check."

"We're getting so security-minded," said Miss Nicholson, "that we might as well be living in a totalitarian state, under the control of a Gestapo."

Miss Nicholson, who was an intellectual liberal, often said things like this, in letters to the press and at public meetings; possibly because she had never lived in a totalitarian state and had no experience of the Gestapo.

Professor Julius Gottlieb, a citizen of Czechoslovakia by birth and of Great Britain by naturalization, read the news in his service flat in Northumberland Court. He took

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eight different Sunday papers, and he found the story, with minor differences and embellishments, in all of them. It was clearly based on an official handout.

As he finished reading, the telephone rang. He hesitated for a long moment before answering it, but when he did so it was his daughter, Paula, calling. She had gone down to Henley for the week-end.

"It's lovely here," she said. "You ought to have come with me."

"I wanted to," said the Professor, "but I had too much work."

"You'd be better off bathing and lying in the sun than worrying about that silly paper. Fritzi's enjoying it like anything. He had a fight with another dog. And he fell into the river and was hissed at by a swan."

"Good," said the Professor. "Good."

He spoke absently. When his daughter had hung up he seemed to be in no hurry to get on with the urgent work which was keeping him in London that fine June week-end. He sat in the window seat, watching the traffic swirl up Northumberland Avenue and turn down Whitehall Place.

The telephone rang again.

On Thursday afternoon a Coroner's Jury came to the conclusion, without difficulty, that Colonel Geoffrey Bax had taken his own life while the balance of his mind was disturbed. Sympathy was expressed for his widow, who was present.

On Sunday morning the Prime Minister took breakfast at Chequers with the Prime Ministers of five of the newly independent African countries. He thought they looked politely surprised at the modest bacon and eggs, toast and marmalade.

"What the devil did they expect me to eat?" he said to his private secretary when the last of his guests had gone. "Boar's head and ambrosia?"

"I imagine Nwambe's idea of a suitable breakfast would be the head of the leader of the opposition, steeped in milk," said the private secretary. "Your next appointment's in five minutes. They've all arrived. I've put them in the small library."

The Prime Minister switched his mind to a problem which was worrying him a lot more than the growing pains of the new African countries. He said, "I want those papers—particularly that rather odd letter Gottlieb wrote to me."

He found four men waiting for him: Ian Mavor, the head of D.I.5; Air Vice-Marshal Pulleyne the acting head of D.I.6 (his superior was in America, engaged in one of the interminable conferences with the C.I.A.); and Commander Elfe, of the Special Branch.

The Prime Minister knew these three personally. The face of the

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fourth man was unfamiliar, and even when Mavor introduced Mr. Fortescue it took the Prime Minister a few moments to place him. Then he remembered that this sedate and respectable-looking man was ostensibly a Bank Manager, and in fact the controller and paymaster of a bunch of middle-aged "cutthroats" known as the "E" Branch of the Joint Services Standing Intelligence Committee.

When the Prime Minister, on taking office, had shouldered, among other unwanted burdens, the supreme responsibility for all security matters, his predecessor had explained to him, "If there's a job which is so disreputable that none of the departments will touch it we give it to the 'E' Branch."

The Prime Minister looked a second time at Mr. Fortescue, who looked back at him kindly but firmly, as if preparing to refuse him an overdraft. An interesting face, thought the Prime Minister. Not unlike that of Arthur Balfour, in middle age.

"You're busy men," he said, "and I apologize for disrupting Sunday for all four of you. If I'd had a more accurate idea of what this trouble was all about, I could probably have let three of you off."

He smiled the boyish smile which had won the hearts of so many of his constituents in the old days.

"But the fact of the matter is that although I'm worried, I haven't the least idea which of you gentleman is going to have to shoulder this particular worry for me. I'll put the problem to you in a nutshell. Certain key men in my government are being got at. You have to find out who's doing it. And you must stop it."

Mr. Fortescue, who was himself an adept in the handling of conferences, found himself admiring the Prime Minister's technique. First the gentle introduction. Then the sharp slap.

"*Got* at, Prime Minister?" said Mavor.

"That was the phrase I used. I can't be more specific, until you gentlemen find out more about it. They are being got at. Not by the opposition, which would be natural, or by the Press, which would be understandable, but by some group of persons who seem determined to get this government out of office."

The Prime Minister saw the quick look which Mavor shot at Pulleyne, but he gave no sign of having done so. He chalked it up as one more item on the debit account of the head of D.I.5. He had liked Mavor's predecessor—a garrulous, drunken, inefficient Irishman—a great deal more than the cold, self-contained, unquestionably efficient Scot; but he had had to get rid of the Irishman after a series of indiscretions, which culminated in his recounting at the Carlton Club the story of the Cabinet

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Minister and his early morning cup of tea to an appreciative audience which had unfortunately included a newspaperman.

"I think," he said, "that when you hear the facts you will agree that I have grounds for disquiet. A few months ago Sir William Samson, one of the senior Revenue Officials, and the man who did most of the work on last year's budget, came to me and told me that he wished to retire. He had eight years to go before his normal retirement. It was extremely inconvenient though not, as it turned out, disastrous, because he had a deputy who was capable of doing his job. But it might have upset the whole of our financial plans.

"Sir William gave me no reason, apart from saying that he was tired. I pointed out that he would lose a good slice of his pension. Since he had private means, that didn't worry him. We had to let him go, of course. He's now in the South of France, and seems to have recovered his health and spirits.

"By itself such an incident meant nothing. But two months ago Dermot Nicholson who, as you know, is Minister of Education, and is therefore in charge of the most important measure of this session—a measure whose success might make the difference between defeat and victory for the party—came to see me. I was at once reminded of Samson. There was the same request—to be relieved of office. The same lack of any plausible reason. The same —I find it difficult to hit on the right word—but it was something a great deal stronger than depression. There was an edge of fear to it. And a background of —well, hopelessness."

The Prime Minister paused, and then added, "If his doctor had told him that morning that he was suffering from an incurable and fatal disease, I should have expected much the same sort of reactions."

The four men stirred uncomfortably in their chairs.

"I suppose," said Elfe, "that he wasn't—"

"I happen to know that there is nothing wrong with Nicholson's health at all. Let me finish. A fortnight ago I had to send for Professor Julius Gottlieb. You all know, roughly, what his job is, I expect? He is the leading expert of city planning in the world—even the Americans admit it. Some months ago, at my request, he completed the first draft of a White Paper on city planning. It wasn't perfect, but believe me, it was two decades in advance of anything this country had yet seen. All the departments concerned—particularly the Treasury and the Minister of Agriculture —picked a few holes in it; but none of them could shoot it down. When all the criticisms had been collected, Gottlieb was to draw up the final version. He now says—"

The Prime Minister paused again; not for effect this time, Mr.

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Fortescue thought, but because he was really worried and angry; then the Prime Minister continued, "He now said that he didn't feel up to the job. He was thinking of retiring. He has a chalet in Switzerland, on the Upper Var. I believe it's famous for its wild flowers. He now said that he had decided to retire and make Switzerland his permanent home."

Commander Elfe said, "It's disturbing, Prime Minister. But is it necessarily political?"

"When Education and Planning are the two cornerstones of this Session? What are people going to say—more to the point, what is the opposition press going to say—if we have to tell them that the Chief Architect of the new Education Bill has thrown in the sponge—and the Government's principal adviser on city planning has refused to finish his own White Paper, and retired to Switzerland to pick wild flowers?"

"It was six months ago," said Mavor in his dry, precise voice, "when Samson walked out. Two months ago when you first got worried about Nicholson. A fortnight ago when Gottlieb threw in his hand. Have no steps been taken?"

"Yes," said Pulleyne. "It looked like a home security matter, so it was handed to us. We put one of our most reliable men onto it. He talked to Nicholson and Gottlieb."

"And did he come to any conclusion as a result of these talks?"

"We don't know. Our man committed suicide a week ago."

"Then you're talking about Colonel Bax?"

"Yes."

"And has he, himself, been investigated?"

Pulleyne flushed and said, "Of course. And there *was* a background story, which could account for it. We haven't got very far with it yet. But it's quite possible that he was being blackmailed, and had been driven too far."

"Well, that's the position, gentlemen," said the Prime Minister. "It could be organized pressure from an unscrupulous group in this country. I don't mean the official opposition. But there are plenty of extremist groups who wouldn't stop short of it. It could be foreign-inspired. I can think of four countries, at this moment, who would give a great deal to have the present government discredited. Or it may be blackmail. I leave you gentlemen to sort out the departmental priorities among yourselves. *I just want it stopped.*"

To his secretary when they had all gone away, the Prime Minister said, "Do you realize that all Prime Ministers have to live out the enthusiasms of their predecessors? Because of Lloyd George's lower middle-class habits I have to entertain official guests to breakfast. Because of Winston's boyish enthusi-

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asm for cops and robbers I have to pretend to be personally responsible for Security. Do you remember that extraordinary thing he wrote —?"

The private secretary didn't remember, but being a good private secretary he was able to put his hand on the reference his employer required. He fetched down a battered olive-green volume from the library shelf, found the place, and read out, *"'Plot and counterplot, ruse and treachery, cross and double-cross, true agent false agent, gold and steel, the bomb and the dagger and the firing party—interwoven in a texture so intricate as to be incredible yet true. The high officers of the secret service revelled in these subterranean depths and pursued their task with cold and silent passion'."*

"I didn't notice any of them reveling," said the Prime Minister. "Did you?"

Ian Mavor and Mr. Fortescue traveled back in the official car together. Mavor said nothing until they were approaching the outskirts of London. Then he closed the glass panel to shut off the driver, and said, "The P.M. mentioned three possible explanations. There are at least two more he omitted."

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue.

"The whole thing *could* be a coincidence. People crack up pretty quickly in government service these days. And all three of the people he mentioned had private means. There was no reason for them to go on punishing themselves doing a job which had got beyond them."

"No," said Mr. Fortescue. "And your other explanation?"

"Another possible explanation is that the Prime Minister has exaggerated the whole thing as an excuse for getting rid of me. I'm afraid he doesn't like me very much."

Mr. Fortescue did not feel it incumbent on him to make any comment on this.

On the following Monday, Dermot Nicholson got back to his flat at Campden Hill just after midnight. A threatened all-night sitting of the House had failed to develop. He was looking forward to a nightcap and bed.

His key went into the lock, but he was unable to turn it, and when he tried to get the key out again he found it was stuck. He rang the bell. Nothing happened. His sister very rarely went to bed before midnight and was most unlikely to be asleep. He rang it again.

Someone, or something, moved in the flat.

There was an indeterminate shuffling noise, and as Nicholson bent his head to listen he thought he heard a faint moan.

In a sudden panic he rattled the door, shouted, put his shoulder to it; then he turned and raced downstairs. There was a night porter, who had a master key. He was an ex-Guardsman, reassuringly solid.

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"If your key's stuck in the lock, sir," he said, "it's no good trying to use my master key. We shall have to break the door down, and the police'll do that quicker than we will."

"Hurry," said Nicholson. "Hurry. Something's happened to my sister. She may have had a stroke."

Detective Sergeant Hallows, who was night duty officer at Notting Hill Gate, arrived within five minutes. He and the police driver went up, carrying between them an assortment of housebreaking implements. It took them an additional three minutes to deal with the front door.

Nicholson pushed past them and went straight to his sister's bedroom. She had been tied to the end of the bed with sheets, and gagged with a towel. The knots had been so savagely tightened that Nicholson was unable to do anything with them.

He picked up a pair of scissors from the dressing table, but his hands were shaking and he dropped them. The Sergeant cut through the sheets with a knife. As soon as the gag was out of her mouth Miss Nicholson started to scream . . .

"I have to announce," said the Prime Minister to the House on Wednesday, "the news—to me, personally, it is very sad news—that the Right Honourable Member for Burnham Heath has had to offer me his resignation as Minister for Education. He has done this on the advice of his doctors. I have not yet finally decided on a successor, but I can assure the House that there will be no change in the Government's education policy."

An opposition back-bencher said, "While we sympathize with the Prime Minister for having lost yet another of his already depleted team, we should be interested to know exactly what the former Minister of Education was suffering from? Could it be that he was sick of the Education Bill—because if so—"

The rest was lost in a roar of government protest and of opposition laughter.

On the same Wednesday, Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens both received telephone calls at home. Mr. Behrens said to his sister, "I've some business in town. I'll probably stay at the Club for a few nights."

His sister said, "You know that I don't like being left here alone."

"Why don't you visit Millicent? She's always asking you to come see her."

"It's tiresome you couldn't have given me a little more notice."

Mr. Calder got his old car out of the woodshed. To Rasselas, who was sunning himself in his favorite spot behind the woodpile he said, "Back tonight." The big dog sighed windily—in almost exactly

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the same way that Miss Behrens had done.

Mr. Fortescue normally operated from the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank. But he had other offices. The one which he used on official occasions was in Richmond Terrace Mews, and it was here that Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens found him.

When Mr. Fortescue had finished talking, Mr. Calder said, "Mightn't there be some danger of getting our wires crossed over this? Most of it sounds like ordinary police work."

"I agree that there's a police angle to it," said Mr. Fortescue. "Since it involves the security of Ministers it's the Special Branch which is involved—Elfe will be in charge of that side of it. He's appointing one of his best men to act as liaison between D.I.5 and the police. Generally speaking, however, it's agreed that you're both to have a free hand."

Mr. Behrens said, "I knew Gottlieb slightly. I met him in the forties, when he first came to England. I could have a word with him."

"Then I'll start with Nicholson," said Mr. Calder.

"It was a pigsty," said Detective Sergeant Hallows. "They did everything filthy they could think of. Over the floor, in the bed, everywhere. We've cleaned up as best we could, but there's some things —well, come and have a look."

He led the way into the living room. Someone had broken the glass in each of the half dozen pictures on the wall and smeared filth over them. They were flower pictures, originals from Montessor's great folio. Looking closer, Mr. Calder saw that not only had the glass been smashed. The name of each plant was inscribed in copperplate at the bottom of each picture. Someone had scored these through with an indelible pencil, and printed the word *PANSY*.

"It's not only the pictures," said Sergeant Hallows. "It's the books, too. Someone took a lot of trouble over this little job."

There were a couple of hundred books in the fitted bookshelves between the windows. The back of every single book had been ripped out with a knife.

"We don't know just what they did do to his sister," said Hallows. "She's in a private nursing home. Maybe she'll be able to tell us something when she gets her wits back."

"Did they take anything?"

"Nicholson says they took some money out of the desk, but it wasn't money they were after. This was a grudge job."

"I agree," said Mr. Calder. He phrased his next question delicately, aware that it might give offense. "Seeing that he was a senior Cabinet Minister, I wondered if any special arrangements might have been made. I know the police can't

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keep a twenty-four hour watch on all these people—"

"He was guarded," said Hallows. "A private outfit was doing the job."

"Private?"

"That's right. We're so short of policemen that government departments have started using private outfits lately. As a matter of fact, this crowd isn't at all bad. A lot of them are ex-policemen."

"They seem to have slipped up on this occasion."

The doorbell rang.

Hallows said, as he went to open it, "No, they didn't slip. They were ditched. I asked the head of the firm to come round. This is probably him now. He can tell you about it."

Mr. Cotter, the managing director and founder of Cotter's Private Detectives, was a thickset, red-faced man with a Brigade mustache. He shook hands with Mr. Calder and said, "Bad business. I've had to give my man Romilly his cards. No alternative. I don't know that it was one hundred per cent his fault. He's never let me down before, anyway."

"What happened?"

"Someone telephoned the night porter, said he was Nicholson's private secretary. The Minister had been detained at a meeting out at Finchley. Could Romilly pick up his car from the forecourt of the House, drive it out to Finchley, pick the old man up, and bring him back to Westminster. It was plausible—damn plausible. After all, his main job's to look after the Minister."

"When this man telephoned," said Mr. Calder, "did he actually say 'Romily'?"

Mr. Cotter thought for a moment, and then said, "Yes. I think he did. Why?"

"It would argue a pretty close knowledge of your set-up if he knew the name of the man on duty at any given time. How many men do you have on a job like this?"

"It's a team of three. They do ten-hour stretches. That gives them a sort of dogwatch."

"Who are the other two?"

Mr. Cotter shot a glance at Sergeant Hallows, who said, "That's all right. Mr. Calder is from the Security Executive. He's helping us."

"I see," said Mr. Cotter. "My other two men on this assignment were Angel and Lawrie." He added stiffly "They're both reliable men."

"Frank Angel," said Mr. Calder. "Small, dark, thick, and Welsh?"

"That's him. Do you know him?"

"I worked with him on one or two jobs at Blenheim," said Mr. Calder.

The atmosphere seemed to have become easier.

Mr. Behrens knew the Head of Records personally, and was thus

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able to get in to see this most closely guarded of all Home Office and Ministry of Defence Officials. He said, "I want your full record on Gottlieb. The X *and* the Y files, please."

"You know as well as I do," said the Head of Records, "that you can't see the Y file without Cabinet authority."

Mr. Behrens laid his authority on the desk. The Head of Records read it through carefully and made a telephone call. To the plump, serious young man with the middle-aged face who arrived in answer to it he said, "This is Mr. Behrens, Smythe. Will you show him the X *and* Y files on Professor Julius Gottlieb."

Smythe said, in the manner of Jeeves, "If you would kindly step this way, sir," and conducted Mr. Behrens to the room in the basement of the building which contained, in numbered filing cabinets, enough high-explosive information to blow up both sides of Whitehall. He unlocked one of the cabinets, drew out two folders, one thick and one thin, placed a table and chair, and said, "I'll leave you to it, sir."

As Mr. Behrens leafed through the folders he was smiling to himself. He was aware of the principles on which this particular room was constructed, and he knew that anyone having access to a Y file was not only watched, but probably photographed as well.

When he had finished he touched the bell. As he did so, he smiled again. He was aware that all he had to do was to say, without raising his voice, "Oh, Smythe—" and the guardian of the papers would have reappeared. But by doing this he would have revealed that he knew quite well that not only was every one of his movements being watched, but the room was wired for sound as well.

Mr. Behrens did no such thing. He had long outgrown any desire to give pointless exhibitions of his own expertise.

After a decent interval the young-old Mr. Smythe reappeared.

"A lot of this Y file," said Mr. Behrens, "is in summary and résumé. I imagine that the original documents—verbatim records of interrogations, and so on—were too bulky to file. Where would they be kept?"

"If they *were* kept," said Smythe, "I imagine they'd be at Brooklands. Or perhaps at Staines."

Mr. Behrens thanked him. Since it was then a quarter to one, he thought he would have lunch before tackling Professor Gottlieb.

The girl who opened the door of the flat in Northumberland Court was, as Mr. Behrens saw, even in the poor light of the front hall, pretty. When she had shown him into the drawing room, he changed his mind. Pretty was all wrong. A stupid word, in any human context. She was attractive, with the attrac-

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tions of dark hair, bright eyes, a good figure, and youth.

She chased a dachshund off the sofa. "We call all our dachshunds Fritz," she said. "After the dog in that comic strip they used to have in the *Daily Mirror*. Do you remember? This one is Fritz the Third. He's the nicest and naughtiest of the lot. Daddy's mad about him."

She departed to summon her father. Mr. Behrens was not himself a susceptible man, but he made a mental note of Miss Gottlieb's charms, since an attractive girl could be a highly relevant factor in any equation.

Professor Gottlieb came in at that moment and turned out to be a small man, with a suggestion of a humpback, a brown face, and a mop of snow-white hair. Like his daughter he was friendly. But it was clear to Mr. Behrens that he was on the defensive.

They talked a little about the war. The Professor had left Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1940 and had reached England in the autumn of that year by a roundabout route, through Greece and Turkey. After being screened he had been allowed to work on deep penetration bombs, where his theoretical knowledge of electronics had been valuable. He had also done some work on D.Z. fuses, and, at the end of the war, on guided missiles.

"It is curious when you come to think of it," said the Professor. "For the first twelve or fifteen years of my professional life I worked on planning projects—in my own country, in Sweden and Denmark, and America. I was hoping to contrive new and better cities for people to live in. Then, for six whole years, I worked at destruction. I helped to knock down whole cities—I was sorry for the people in them, of course. But even while I was doing it—yes, even when the bombs were falling on me in London—I could not help saying to myself, 'We are clearing the way for a gigantic reconstruction, a reconstruction such as the world has never seen before'."

For a moment the Professor's eyes were alight with an old enthusiasm. Then the glow died down. "The chance has been missed," he said, "and it will never come again."

"If it is missed," said Mr. Behrens, "it won't be your fault. When your paper is published—"

"Ah, my paper," said the Professor. "I am afraid that too much reliance has been placed on that. You cannot change human nature with a piece of paper."

"You can't if it isn't published."

The Professor looked up sharply.

"I trust," he said, "that you are not going to turn what has been a very pleasant conversation into the channels of politics."

"I'm not a politician," said Mr.

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Behrens. "I'm a policeman. Of a sort. I can show you my credentials if you like."

"Don't bother," said the Professor. "I was told you would be coming. It was not made clear to me how you could help, though."

"I can only help," Mr. Behrens said, "if you tell me what's been happening."

"Silly things. Stupid things. Things one hardly wants to talk about." He hesitated. "Letters. Telephone calls. We had a word for it in my country. *Nagelschwerein*. You would translate it as pinprickery."

"When did it start?"

"About six months ago."

"Did you report it at once?"

"Not until it became—unpleasant. Not until it started to involve my family as well as me. Paula, my daughter, was sent these one morning. They made her physically ill."

The Professor, as he was speaking, had moved across and unlocked a drawer in his desk. Now he handed Mr. Behrens a postcard-sized folder. On the outside was written, *A present for a nice girl*. It opened out into a string of connected photographs. They were so revolting that Mr. Behrens' nose and lips wrinkled.

He said, "Have the police tried to trace the origin of these?"

"I have shown them to no one. Paula forbade it. The thought of having to give evidence—"

"No, it wouldn't be nice," agreed Mr. Behrens. "May I keep them for a while?"

"Please do," said the Professor. "I'd be happy if I never saw them again."

Mr. Behrens paused before framing his next question. Then he said, "These letters and messages. Have they been just general stuff? Or has there been anything—well, specific?"

"The police have the letters. I cannot remember what was said on the telephone."

"Of course not. But what line did they take? Pure xenophobia? Go back home to Czechoslovak—that sort of thing?"

Mr. Behrens paused invitingly.

"It was that sort of thing," agreed the Professor.

He's lying, thought Mr. Behrens, and he's going to go right on lying. Because he's been frightened—badly. I can't get anything more out of him at the moment.

He said, "I'll leave you this telephone number. It's on the London Code. Someone there will be able to make contact with me at once if I should be wanted."

And Mr. Behrens took his leave.

Richard Redmayne finished his whiskey, accepted a second one, and said to Mr. Calder, "It's a bloody shame. The old man was the best prospect as Minister of Education this country has had in a century. You think I'm prejudiced because I was his secretary. Per-

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haps I am. But I can tell you this: without Nicholson we're never going to get this Bill through."

"The P.M. said he had an able deputy who would carry on with the same policy."

"Able deputy my foot! Morris is an old woman. He's started hedging already. Before we know where we are, we shall be back to that 'Comprehensive' nonsense."

They were in a public house near St. James's Park Underground Station, much patronized by the Junior staffs from Whitehall.

Mr. Calder said, "I suppose there's no chance he'll change his mind."

"None at all. He's made all his plans. As soon as his sister's fit to move, they're both going to Canada."

"Why Canada?"

"That's where his family came from. He says they've got a really efficient security service out there, too. If *they* say they're going to look after you, they do it."

"Look here," said Mr. Calder, "you knew Nicholson as well as anyone. Better than most. Have you got any idea why—or, more to the point—how anyone could have been getting to him?"

"Apart from politics, you mean?"

"Apart from politics. This wasn't the first attack, was it?"

"He'd had letters. And telephone calls. The sort of thing every man in public life gets."

"General abuse? Or something specific?"

"I don't follow you."

Mr. Calder said patiently, "There are two ways of attacking a public man. You can pick on some large, popularly believed sort of lie. For example, if he went to the London School of Economics and wears a red tie, he's a Communist. If he's a bachelor he's homosexual. And if you go on repeating that sort of lie, long and loud enough, someone will believe it in the end.

"The other method is to pick up some incident in their past life. It may be something quite silly, which wouldn't matter tuppence if it was you or me—but which can be magnified out of all proportion if you're a public figure. You know what I mean?"

"Yes," said Redmayne. "I know exactly what you mean."

He sat staring into his glass for so long that a casual observer might have thought the conversation was at an end. Mr. Calder knew better. Redmayne was making up his mind.

In the end Redmayne said, "Well, he was a bachelor—"

The disposal of paper is a recurrent headache in government departments. Some of it can be destroyed, and some of it must clearly be kept handy; but the bulk of it falls into that middle class of documents which no one can see any immediate use for, but which may

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conceivably be wanted some day. Having filled an abandoned motor-car factory near Staines Bridge, the Records Department has now taken over an airplane hangar at Brooklands, and is fast filling that up, too.

"Five cubic yards of paper a week," said the Custodian to Mr. Behrens. "And it's getting worse. I haven't the staff to cope with it."

Mr. Behrens sympathized. He had found that a little sympathy went a long way with minor officials. "I'll do the searching myself," he said, "if you could just put me on the right track. For instance, I imagine that you index this stuff by departments. The papers I want would have come from the old M.I.5—"

"The worst of the lot," said the Custodian.

"I can tell you the approximate year of origin, too. This would have originated at Blenheim in late 1940."

"When would it have been filed?"

"Probably after the end of the war."

"We got a lot of stuff from Blenheim in 1946. That's all at Staines, though."

Mr. Behrens went to Staines.

Late that afternoon he unearthed a bundle of yellow dockets. They were labeled *Routine Interrogation Reports. Nov.-Dec. 1940. A-L.* They appeared to be curiously incomplete.

He read them through, and then pressed the bell. When the official shuffled up, Mr. Behrens said to him, "Has anyone else been having a look at these particular records lately?"

The official said that he really couldn't say. All sorts of people came down every day to see papers. All *he* had to do was to be satisfied about their credentials. *He* couldn't keep a record of what papers they looked at.

Mr. Behrens reflected that if you paid people as little as they probably paid this particular civil servant, it was idle to expect any enthusiastic or efficient service.

He went back to London.

He had booked himself a room at Dons-in-London (or the "Dilly" Club) which occupies two large houses north of Lords Cricket Ground and has the worst food and the best wine in London. It also has a unique library of classical pornography and several complete sets of the works of Dickens, Trollope, and Thackeray. Mr. Behrens always used the D.I.L. when he could, since he could rely on meeting a number of his cronies there.

"I understand that Sands-Douglas is up in London," he said to Mr. Calder. "I wanted to have a word with him—he was at Blenheim in 1940. You probably remember him. Why don't you join us at dinner?"

"*After* dinner," said Mr. Calder firmly.

At seven o'clock Mr. Behrens

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alighted from the Bakerloo tube at Marlborough Road Station and started up toward the street. The evening rush was over, and the long escalator was nearly empty. Mr. Behrens sailed sedately upward, wrapped in meditation, like a marabout being received into the first of his seven Heavens. At the top he gave up his ticket and dawdled out into the street.

There were very few people about in Finchley Road. Mr. Behrens noticed a policeman, strolling along the opposite pavement in a purposeful way which suggested that he was coming off duty and heading for home. Mr. Behrens crossed the road. When he reached the pavement he stopped so abruptly that the man who had been crossing behind him bumped into him.

Mr. Behrens whirled round, glared at him, and said, "Why are you following me?"

"What chew talking about?" said the man. He was stout, bald, and unremarkable except for a twisted upper lip which seemed to give him some difficulty in enunciating.

"You've been following me for more than an hour," said Mr. Behrens. "And doing it very badly."

"You're making a nerror there," said the man. Mr. Behrens was blocking his way, and he dodged to one side to get past him.

Mr. Behrens whipped up his umbrella and thrust the metal tip, hard, into the man's abdomen. The man let out a scream.

"Now then," said the policeman. "What's all this?"

The man was doubled up, speechless. Mr. Behrens said, "This gentleman has been making a nuisance of himself. He accosted me, and tried to sell me some most unpleasant pictures."

"Thass a lie," said the man. But his eyes were flickering from side to side. "I never did anything to him. He poked me with his umbrella."

"*Did* you offer to sell anything to this gentleman?"

"Course I didn't!"

"He's got them in his coat pocket," said Mr. Behrens.

"Thass a lie, too." The man clapped a hand to his pocket and his expression changed. He drew out the postcard-sized folder. As he did so, it fell open disclosing the photographs inside it.

"Do you mind if I have a look at those?" said the Constable.

"It's a plant," said the man. "I never—"

He pushed the Constable away, dodged past Mr. Behrens, and started off up the pavement. Mr. Behrens, reversing his umbrella, caught him round one ankle with the handle. The man crossed his legs and fell heavily.

"You'll have to come along to the station," said the Constable. "I take it you'll be preferring a charge, sir."

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"I shall certainly do so," said Mr. Behrens. "Here is my card. I think it disgraceful if one cannot pay a visit to London without being subjected to the attention of men like that."

Harry Sands-Douglas was a very large man, with a pink face, a thatch of iron-gray hair, and eyes the color of forget-me-nots. He finished his helping of marmalade pudding, pushed back his plate, and lit a large curved pipe.

"I think you did quite right," he said. "I hope you can make the charge stick."

"It might be difficult actually to charge him," said Mr. Behrens. "All I really hoped to do was to get rid of him."

"They'll hold him overnight," said Mr. Calder. He had joined them for port. "If you go round to the police station and withdraw the charge, they'll probably let him go. Then we could put a tail on him and see who's employing him. That really would be useful."

"It's an idea," said Mr. Behrens. "I'll telephone Elfe tonight. The interrogation originals at Staines were incomplete. Someone's been through them. But Harry tells me that duplicates *were* kept."

"They were microfilmed," said Sands-Douglas. "They were too bulky to be kept any other way. When I think of the amount of paper we filled up questioning perfectly harmless people."

"Where are the microfilms stored?"

"I've an idea it's somewhere at Oxford. I can find out. I'll ask Happold. He was in charge of that side of it."

"Good heavens," said Behrens. "Is Happold still alive? He must be ninety if he's a day."

"Ninety-one," said Sands-Douglas. "And swims in the Cherwell every morning."

At half-past ten Mr. Behrens said to Mr. Calder, "Why don't you stay the night here? I'm sure they can find you a bed."

"It's kind of you," said Mr. Calder, "but I told Rasselas I'd be back. He'll be worried if I don't turn up."

Mr. Calder caught the last train from Victoria to Swanley, picked up his car which he had left there, and drove back to Lamperdown, under a half moon, through the quiet lanes which smelled of tar and honeysuckle. A question about Mr. Behrens' assailant was teasing him. It was a matter of timing. The morning would probably solve it, so he put it out of his mind.

Half a mile from the cottage a gray shape loomed. Mr. Calder braked sharply, and pulled the car into a field gate. The great dog ran up to him and stopped, head cocked. He had made no sound.

"All right," said Mr. Calder. "Message received and understood."

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He opened the gate and drove his car in. It was a slight slope, and it was not a light car, but there was a surprising strength in Mr. Calder's barrel chest and stocky legs. When the car had been safely hidden, he started to walk home.

The dog ran ahead, silent as a cloud.

Two hundred yards from the cottage a lane forked to the left. It led to a field, which was rented to a farmer. Rasselas went forward slowly. At a bend in the lane he stopped again.

A tradesman's truck was parked, facing toward him. The offside door was open, and there was a man standing beside it. Mr. Calder turned softly and went back the way he had come.

Fifty yards down the lane there was a gap in the hedge. He wriggled through it on hands and knees and crept up the inside of the hedge until he could see the top of the truck. Then, very gently, an inch at a time, he edged forward until he could see the whole truck.

The man was still standing beside the open door, one foot on the step. He was watching the lane, and had one hand in his pocket. He looked wide-awake. Mr. Calder didn't like it. Even a small truck suggested numbers.

Half an hour passed slowly. Then there came the clink of shod feet against stone, and three other forms loomed into view.

Rasselas, who was lying almost on top of Mr. Calder inside the hedge, stiffened, and his lips drew back from his long white teeth. Mr. Calder clamped a hand firmly down on his head.

Two of the newcomers were carrying something heavy between them. It looked like an ammunition box. They opened the back of the truck, pushed it in, and climbed in beside it. The third man got up beside the driver. Under its own momentum the truck rolled quietly down the lane. As it reached the road, Mr. Calder heard the engine start up.

Not being a man who believed in taking unnecessary chances against professional opposition, Mr. Calder spent the remaining hours of darkness in the ditch.

At a quarter to four, as the sky was whitening and the birds were starting to talk, he walked up the lane and approached his cottage with caution. Rasselas moved beside him. They avoided the doors, and went in by one of the side windows, which Mr. Calder opened with a long flat knife. Then, together, they made a very careful search.

They both worked by sight, but Rasselas had the additional faculty of acute smell to help him. And it was the deerhound that unearthed both of the boobytraps. One was under the gas cooker, operated by the gas switch. The other was in the lavatory, operated by another switch. Neither was exactly origi-

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nal, but both, as Mr. Calder noted, had been very neatly and professionally installed.

He telephoned Mr. Fortescue, at his home in Leatherhead, and gave him the license number of the truck, and a brief account of what had happened.

Mr. Fortescue, who sounded very wide-awake although it was still short of six in the morning, said, "Someone's got onto you very quickly, haven't they?"

"I thought the same," said Mr. Calder. "And another thing—they were trained men, working under discipline."

There was a long silence. Then Mr. Fortescue said, "When you come up to town this morning, you'd better drop in at the Bank."

After breakfast Mr. Calder recovered his car and drove it back to the cottage. He was nearly out of gas, but there was a spare can in his garage. When he pulled at the garage door it stuck, as it often did. He gave it a sharp jerk.

As he did so, the garage disintegrated and the door came flying out to meet him . . .

When Mr. Behrens arrived at the Swiss Cottage Police Station he sensed that something had happened. The station sergeant showed him straight up to the C.I.D. room where he found Detective Inspector Larrymore in conference with a red-faced detective sergeant and a youngish, black-haired Superintendent from the Special Branch.

"What's gone wrong?" said Mr. Behrens pleasantly.

"You haven't heard?" said Larrymore.

"I've heard nothing," said Mr. Behrens, "but you've all got faces like a wet Monday morning, and I've never known a station sergeant to be affable before, so I guessed—"

"I'm afraid," said the Special Branch man, "that they've pulled a fast one on us. I got instructions from Commander Elfe late last night that a man might be released from here in the course of the morning, and that he was to be followed. I've got a two-car team waiting outside."

"Then—?"

"He was released at ten o'clock last night."

"What!"

Larrymore said, "Two men turned up, with a car. They had full D.I.5 credentials. They took the prisoner over. The man in charge ought to have checked back —"

The red-faced detective sergeant went even redder, and Mr. Behrens guessed that he had been the man in charge, and felt sorry for him.

"It's easy to be wise after the event," Mr. Behrens said. "Exactly what credentials did they produce?"

"They had identity cards, with photographs, sir," the detective ser-

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geant said. "As far as I could see they were properly signed and had the official stamp on them. And a letter on official notepaper to the officer in charge here, authorizing the handover. But it wasn't only that, sir—"

The Special Branch man looked up sharply and said, "What else, then?"

"Well, sir, it's difficult to say—but they *looked* right. When I was a recruit we did a three-weeks course with the Security people. As a matter of fact, I thought I recognized one of them as an instructor on the course. It was some time ago, and I suppose I must have been mistaken—"

An uncomfortable silence was broken by the ringing of the telephone. Larrymore took the call and said, "It's for you, Mr. Behrens."

It was Mr. Fortescue. He said, "Would you come round to the Bank at once. Use a police car. It can drop you at the Abbey, and you can come in the back way. Don't waste any time."

"Has something happened?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fortescue. "Calder's in Gravesend Hospital. He's not dead yet, but he's quite far down on the danger list."

"I received the message at my Whitehall office, when I got there this morning," said Mr. Fortescue. "Calder must have been conscious, because he gave the number to a doctor at Gravesend, and it was he who rang me. It must have happened between six and nine in the morning. Because Calder had already telephoned me—"

He told Mr. Behrens about it.

"I see," said Mr. Behrens. "He must have missed a third trap. They're very thorough, these people, aren't they? Were you able to trace the truck?"

"The police traced it. It was stolen in the Borough yesterday."

"At about what time? Do they know?"

"Before two o'clock—between one and two." Before Mr. Behrens could say anything, Mr. Fortescue stopped him. "I hadn't missed the point," he said. "Take it with the business at Swiss Cottage Police Station last night, and it adds up to something I'm not at all keen on thinking about. I gather that I'm to see the Prime Minister this afternoon. And I've gathered something else, too. Mavor is *not* being invited to the meeting."

From Mr. Fortescue's office you could hear Big Ben quite clearly. First, the four sets of warning notes. Then the ten strokes of the hour. It wasn't until the last of them had died away that either man spoke again.

Then it was Mr. Behrens who broke the silence. He said, "Of course, it was always in the cards that something like this might happen. It's happened often enough in other countries. We've never had it here. I think I'd better go down to

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Gravesend. If Calder can still talk, he'll find it easier to talk to me than to anyone else."

"Very well," said Mr. Fortescue. "I don't need to tell you to be careful."

"I shall be extremely careful," Mr. Behrens assured him.

He was so careful that it took him three hours to reach Gravesend, and he entered the Infirmary by the tradesman's entrance. He found a policeman standing in the corridor which led to the private rooms, identified himself, and was allowed into an anteroom. Here he found a grim-faced nurse, seated at a table, guarding the inner door. She said, "No one can go in without Dr. Henfry's permission."

"Then perhaps," said Mr. Behrens, "you would be kind enough to send for Dr. Henfry."

This was clearly a breach of protocol. Nurses in hospitals do not run errands for visitors. She rang a bell, summoning a porter. The porter disappeared, and silence fell.

Dr. Henfry, when he arrived five minutes later, was large and red-headed, the sort of man who would be a welcome addition to the pack in any hospital rugger team. He said, "If your name's Behrens, you can come in for five minutes."

"Thank you," said Mr. Behrens. "Will you want the blood transfusions, Doctor?"

"I'll let you know," said Dr. Henfry. "Come along, Mr. Behrens. And very quiet, please."

The bed in the room was entirely hidden by screens. Dr. Henfry closed the door carefully, and bolted it. Then he moved the nearest screen and Mr. Behrens saw Mr. Calder. He was sitting up in bed, reading the *Times*. On the table by his bed was the remains of a pork pie on a paper bag and two bottles of Bass.

"It's not what we usually like to give our invalids for breakfast," said Dr. Henfry with a grin. "Particularly when they're at death's door. But it's all I could manage. I had to buy it myself and smuggle it in in my instrument case."

"Do I gather," said Mr. Behrens, "that you are *not* dying?"

"That's right," said Mr. Calder. "But you and Dr. Henfry are the only ones who know it, and it's going to stay that way for a bit. The deputation who called at my cottage last night left a third visiting card, in the form of a few pounds of gelignite, controlled by a trembler fuse and a detonator. They left it in the inspection pit in my garage.

"If I'd driven the car over it, I'd have been blown to Jericho. Luckily I set it off from outside by banging on the door. The door hit me and knocked me cold. But it also protected me. I was still unconscious when the milkman came along. He put me straight into his truck, bless him, and brought me

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down here. I'd come round by that time, and I realized what a stroke of luck the whole thing was. I put Dr. Henfry wise, and he's done the rest."

"I've had a gaggle of reporters round here already," said Dr. Henfry. "I told them you might recover—with luck, and devoted nursing. You've had three blood transfusions already."

"Excellent," said Mr. Calder.

"I'd better take Mr. Behrens out now, or the nurse will start worrying. I'll show him back in along the balcony."

When they were together again, Mr. Calder said, "You can tell Fortescue, of course, but no one else. I'm going to clear out as soon as its dark. Dr. Henfry is fetching me some clothes and money."

"I assume you're going under cover."

"We both are. We'll use Mrs. Palfrey's. She always makes us comfortable."

"Is this just general caution or something special?"

Mr. Calder was busy pouring out the second bottle of Bass and did not answer for a moment. Then he said, "That fuse on the plastic explosive under the grill was micrometer set. I shouldn't have needed to turn the gas on. The lightest touch on the switch would have set it off.

"When I'd immobilized it, I took some photographs. The whole thing had been beautifully concealed. Even if you stooped down you could hardly see a thing. All the wires were taped, and the tapes themselves had been fishtailed and folded under at the end.

"Do you remember that sergeant at the demoliiton school. 'Five minutes extra work, gentlemen. But it may well make the difference between success and failure.' *He* always fishtailed the ends of his tapes. When I saw those tapes, I decided it was time to go under cover."

"I have on my books at this moment," said Mr. Fortescue to the Prime Minister, "twenty men and four women, any two of whom—they usually work in pairs—I might have allotted to this particular assignment. I selected Calder and Behrens, and I telephoned both of them on Wednesday evening. The line which I used is, I can assure you, safe.

"They both saw me on Thursday morning. It is true that they came quite openly, and my office in Richmond Terrace might be watched, although, as Commander Elfe will tell you, the security precautions are such that it would be very difficult for anyone to do so without themselves being observed."

Commander Elfe, who was the only other person present, nodded, and said, "Not impossible, but so difficult that I think we can rule it out."

"In any event," Mr. Fortescue

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went on, "Calder and Behrens were not the only people who saw me that morning. I had routine matters to discuss with at least six other members of my department."

"So," said the Prime Minister, "up to that time, no one would have any reason to connect them with this particular job. What did they do next?"

"Behrens visited the Records Department in the new Defence Building and from there went to call on Professor Gottlieb. Calder went to Campden Hill to talk to the Sergeant in charge of the Nicholson inquiry."

"At either of which points they could have been picked up and followed."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Fortescue. "Only Mr. Behrens did not reach the Gottlieb flat until a quarter past two, and Mr. Calder went to Campden Hill even later—at three o'clock. The truck used for the visit to Mr. Calder's cottage was stolen between one and two. It was clearly stolen for that particular job, and was abandoned after the job had been done."

The Prime Minister looked at Elfe, who looked at Mr. Fortescue, and said, "What it amounts to is this: the only people who could have known by mid-day that Behrens was on this job were the Staff of the Defence Ministry. If they knew Behrens was on it, they would have assumed Calder was involved as well."

"I'm afraid that's right," said Mr. Fortescue.

"Gentlemen," said the Prime Minister, "I am not an alarmist. And thirty years in politics have taught me not to jump to conclusions. But if you add that last fact to certain others—the way in which Behrens' assailant was liberated, for example—the method and execution of the attack on Calder, for another example—I'm afraid that a very distasteful probability emerges."

"You mean," said Commander Elfe bluntly, "that Security Executive are playing politics."

In a comfortable bed-sitting room, in that area of bed-sitting rooms which lies between the station and the Rugby football ground at Twickenham, Mr. Behrens poured out a cup of tea for Mr. Calder, and said, "How many so far?"

"Seventeen near certainties," said Mr. Calder. "Seventeen cases of men in public life driven out, and all of them high up. Nine have gone to live abroad. Two are in institutions. Six, including Bax, have taken their own lives. And if those are the ones we *know* about, you can be certain that the real total is two or three times as many."

Mr. Behrens said, "It was the technique which convinced me, much more than all that working out of times and places. It was such an exact reproduction of the interrogation techniques which both

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sides brought to horrible perfection during the war. If you wanted to break a man down, what did you do?

"First, you made him uncomfortable. It was far more demoralizing for a man to be cold or filthy or sleepless or thirsty than to be hurt. Torture builds up a corresponding resistance. The Russians discovered that a long time ago.

"The interrogators' second weapon was to find something—it didn't matter what—but something which his victim was ashamed of. Some weakness, some slip, some shady episode. If he harped on it skillfully enough he could, in the end, break the man to pieces. You know that."

"I know that," said Mr. Calder. He stirred his tea and looked round the comfortable, lower middle-class sitting room. Mrs. Palfrey's grandfather and grandmother stared back at him from fading brown oleographs over the mantlepiece. He found reassurance in their Victorian rigidity.

Calder continued, "Public servants are sitting ducks. They loathe fuss. They avoid scandal. And they can't run away. That's the big point—they're nailed to their jobs.

"Take a man like Nicholson. He had to be within reach of both Westminster and Whitehall. The only way for him to go out was to go right out . . . I wonder what they had on him. And how many times he paid up before he decided to fight back."

The arrival of Mrs. Palfrey with a kettle of hot water and the evening paper saved Mr. Behrens from having to reply. He found an item at the bottom of the front page which seemed to interest him.

He read it out. "A party of bird-watchers on the Cooling Marshes yesterday discovered, in one of the salt-water dykes, the body of a man. He has not yet been identified. The following description has been issued. Age, about forty-five. Height, five foot six. Stoutly built. A marked malformation of the upper lip."

"Do we know him?" said Mr. Calder.

"My acquaintance with him," said Mr. Behrens, "was limited to poking him in the stomach with my umbrella. I cannot regard him as a great loss."

"Quick work, all the same," said Mr. Calder. "They don't believe in leaving loose ends about, do they? I wonder what they'll do next . . ."

Richard Redmayne and Paula Gottlieb were sitting on the bench in Green Park. They made a handsome couple. His conventional dress could not conceal a certain long-limbed, coordinated strength, the product of a school which was unfashionable enough to think athletic prowess important; the girl was dark, lively, and very young-looking.

She said, "Have you heard from Mr. Nicholson?"

"He's arrived in Canada," said

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Richard. "I had a short letter. He and his sister have got a flat in Toronto. He says they're settling down very happily." He was unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"'We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him, lived in his mild and magnificent eye, learned his great language, caught his clear accents, made him our pattern to live or to die'."

"That's poetry," said Richard suspiciously.

"Robert Browning's *The Lost Leader*. You remember? 'But for a handful of silver he left us'."

"It wasn't money in his case," said Richard. "It was fear. How's your father?"

This change of subject did not appear to surprise Paula. She had reached a stage of friendship with Richard when such sudden jumps in conversation were part of the fun. She said, "If only he'd make up his mind. It's the uncertainty which is so horrible. If he'd only tell me—tell someone—what it's all about. He just sits at home, hardly goes out at all. I had a job to persuade him to go out this morning and get his hair cut and have lunch at his club."

"That's two o'clock striking now," said Richard. "I've got to get back. But I'll walk home with you first."

As soon as Paula opened the door of the flat she knew something was wrong.

"What's up?" said Richard.

"Where's Fritz?" There was panic in the girl's voice. "We left him to guard the house, and he always runs out to meet me."

Through the open door of the drawing room they could glimpse the chaos inside—overturned chairs, broken glass, something seeping under the door staining the hall carpet.

Richard said urgently, "Don't go in there—stop." But he found himself unable to hold her. She ran past him and threw herself into the room. As he grabbed the telephone he heard her give a single choked scream.

When the police, and her father, arrived five minutes later, she was still on her knees, sobbing uncontrollably, with a brown and black head cradled on her lap . . .

In the hot, blacked-out room—half laboratory, half office—two men pored over the microfilm reader.

"It's here if it's anywhere," said Sands-Douglas. "November 2nd, 1940. That was the day he arrived. The main interrogation would have started the day after. We usually gave them a night's rest first."

Old Mr. Happold, as thin and as indestructible as dried seaweed, fed a second roll of microfilm into the reader and adjusted the reading glass. He was unaffected by the heat and closeness of the room.

"This looks like the one," he said.

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"Do you know exactly what it is we're looking for?"

"We're looking for a name," said Sands-Douglas. "A name out of the past. And I do believe—"

He wiped a hand across his face to clear the sweat out of his eyes. "Yes. That's it. I'll have to use your telephone. I think we shall have to risk an open line."

Professor Gottlieb looked round the table. There were four men there. Commander Elfe of the Special Branch he knew; and he had met Mr. Fortescue before and was aware that he was connected with Security. The thickset man whom they called Mr. Calder was new to him, and Mr. Behrens, who looked like a retired schoolmaster, was the one who had questioned him earlier.

"I don't think," said the Professor, "that they could do anything more horrible than they did this morning. It was a mistake. Since there is nothing worse they can do, I no longer have any motive not to speak.

"When I came to this country in 1940 I brought with me a secret of which I was bitterly ashamed. I am not a man of action and could never have arranged my own escape from Prague. I should not have known how to start—it was all arranged for me.

"When I told my story to your interrogators, I said that my escape had been arranged by the Czech underground. That was a lie. It had been arranged by the Germans. They bartered my escape for some information I was able to give them. I didn't know why they wanted it—but that's no excuse. It led to the execution of two of my colleagues in Prague University."

The Professor choked a little, then after recovering, he went on, "I thought, for a long time, that the secret had died with them. I still have no idea how anyone found out."

"The man who interrogated you," said Mr. Fortescue, "also dealt with compatriots of yours. He heard rumors from them and was able to verify it after the war from German sources. But please go on."

"There is very little more. Seven years ago, when I began to be well known here—and well paid—the blackmail started. For seven years I have paid away about one-third of all my income. Lately the demands were increased. I balked. Other forms of pressure were applied. I could do nothing to stop them and I was afraid that if I complained, the whole truth would come out. I see now that I have been stupid. I should have spoken at once. But it is difficult to see these things when you are on your own, when you feel so helpless."

"Have you any idea who the blackmailers were?" asked Commander Elfe.

"None at all. I never saw them, or spoke to them, except on the tele-

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phone. I drew the money every month in banknotes, and sent it to what I imagine was an accommodation address. Good God, how many others have been paying!"

He paused, and looked round the table at the four men. Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens were impassive. The burly Commander Elfe had a scowl on his face. Mr. Fortescue was gazing out of the window; he had a cold and clinical glint in his eye. It reminded Professor Gottlieb of a surgeon he had once watched, weighing the chances of a delicate and critical operation.

"And that's really all I can tell you," he said with a sigh. "Do you think there is any chance of catching these men, of smashing this blackmail ring?"

Mr. Fortescue swiveled his head round so that he was looking directly at the Professor. He said "Oh, yes. We now know who these men are, and where they operate from. It will be comparatively simple to render them harmless. But if we are actually to catch and convict them, we shall need a lot of luck—and your help."

"I am glad that my worst suspicions were wrong," said the Prime Minister, "and I apologize for them." He had invited Ian Mavor, the head of D.I. 5 to dinner, and they were sitting together over their brandy.

"Not so far wrong," said Mavor. The apology and the brandy were working on him. "Most of them are either ex-D.I.5 or ex-policemen. The leader is a man named Cotter. I knew him quite well. A guardsman. A very able officer, an excellent linguist, and a very good organizer. A bit too ruthless for peacetime operations.

"He left us in the mid-fifties. I think he was disappointed over not getting a promotion. Then he set up this private inquiry organization—Cotter's Private Detectives. We've been using him quite a bit lately ourselves. Guarding V.I.P.'s and that sort of thing."

"And it was his men who were put in charge of Nicholson?"

"That wasn't very clever," said Mavor, "but if they keep us short of policemen it's bound to happen. Businesses hire private gunmen to look after their payrolls now. Private watchmen patrol building estates. Private guards for V.I.P's—it was a logical, inevitable step."

"How did you find out about him?"

"We went right back to the record of Gottlieb's first interrogation. Cotter was the man who did it. We got a cross reference when we found out that Cotter and one of his men, Lawrie, had been the two 'referees' given by Smythe when he got his job in our Records Department. That was a bad slip, and it was entirely my fault."

The Prime Minister was aware that the head of D.I. 5 was offering him his resignation if he chose to

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take it. He rejected the offering. His opinion of Ian Mavor had changed in the course of the evening.

He said, "Everyone's allowed one mistake. Even in politics. What are you doing about Smythe?"

"For the moment we're leaving him where he is. He happens to form rather a useful channel of communication. One of his jobs is to monitor the Records Room. If we want to get a piece of information across to Cotter, without appearing to do so, all that's necessary is a little calculated indiscretion between two of our men when searching the files—"

"Do I gather from that," said the Prime Minister, "that some definite action is contemplated?"

"Yes, Mr. Fortescue has the matter in hand," said Mavor.

"It's not going to be at all easy," said Mr. Fortescue "but we have three points in our favor." He ticked them off with one finger of his right hand on the extended fingers of his left hand.

"First, they have no reason at all to think that we suspect them. And, of course, they must continue in this happy state of ignorance.

"Second, we can, if we are careful, leak information to them through Smythe.

"Third, and most important, I think they are bound to react to Professor Gottlieb. Like all bullies, if one of their victims rebels, and they do nothing about it, other victims will follow suit. I am arranging for Professor Gottlieb to rebel."

"They might go for his daughter," said Elfe. "It would be in line with their other dirty tactics."

"I had thought of that myself," said Mr. Fortescue, and Elfe looked up sharply.

"Do I understand that you're going to use the girl as bait?" he asked.

"It seems to me the simplest of a number of possible methods," said Mr. Fortescue. "We'll keep the Professor in town and put such a fence of guards round him that they can't touch him. As a preliminary precaution, the girl will be sent to the country. Not too far. I had in mind the Thetford area in Norfolk. The Army used it as a battle school during the war and parts of it are still quite deserted."

"And you're going to let them know she's there?"

"It will come to their ears in about a week's time."

"I don't like it," said Elfe. "It's too risky—much too risky."

"Any plan will be risky," said Mr. Fortescue. "This plan will, I think, have less risk than most. I always prefer to engage in battle on ground of my own choosing."

"Who are you going to send with her. Calder—or Behrens?"

"If I sent either of them, it would be stupid of Cotter to go near her and Cotter is not a stupid man. No. I had in mind that Nicholson's secretary, young Redmayne, would be

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the man for the job. They know each other—are, in fact, good friends. They'll be suitably chaperoned, of course."

Harwood Farm lay at the end of a mile of lane. It was a pleasant, rambling, yellow brick building with two vast barns. It had been empty for some months, since the last tenant-farmer had moved out. Its fields were now farmed by a man who came over occasionally from Tunstock.

One of the most pleasant features of their stay, thought Richard Redmayne, had been the efforts they had made to bring the place back to life. For a fortnight he and Paula and the dour Mrs. Moss had washed and scrubbed and scoured and sandpapered and painted.

Paula had revealed several unexpected skills. First, she had dismantled and cleaned the engine and dynamo which supplied them with electricity. Then, with the aid of a carload of technical supplies from Norwich, she had stepped up the output, so that bulbs which had previously shone with a dim, religious light now glowed brightly.

"My father taught me not to be afraid of electricity," she said. "It's just like water. You see water coming out of a tap. A nice steady flow. Halve the outlet, and you double the power. Like this."

She was holding a length of hose in her hand, swilling down the choked gutters in the yard. As she pinched the end of the hose, a thin jet of water hissed out.

"All right," said Richard, ducking. "You needn't demonstrate. I understand the principle. I didn't know it applied to electricity, that's all."

"Tomorrow," said Paula, "I'm going to get Mrs. Moss to stoke up the boiler, and then I'll run a hose into the big barn. I'll use a proper valve, and we'll build up the pressure. Then you'll see what steam can do. Did you know that if you got a fine enough jet and sufficient pressure behind it you could cut metal with steam?"

"For God's sake don't try it," said Richard. "We shall end by blowing ourselves up!"

"You're just a coward," said Paula, smiling. "By the way, did you see the *Times* this morning? It's got something about daddy in it."

It was a paragraph on the Home News page. It said that Professor Gottlieb was confident of finishing his final revision of the White Paper on City Planning before the end of the month. The Professor had held a news conference in which he had said that certain minor technical difficulties had been holding him up but now they had been satisfactorily disposed of.

"He's trailing his coat," said Paula.

"What do you mean?"

"You must think me an idiot if you imagine I don't know what's

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going on. He's provoking these people to attack him, isn't he? And that's why I've been stowed away here, to be out of harm's way."

"Well—" said Richard.

"And you're my guard. There's no need to apologize. I'm enjoying it—whenever I can stop worrying about daddy."

"He'll be well looked after," said Richard.

Better looked after, he couldn't help thinking, than Paula herself. He recalled the single afternoon of instruction he had been given, on the range in Wellington Barracks, with the pistol which he now carried, tucked under his left armpit by day and placed under his pillow each night. It was comforting to have a gun, but he was still far from certain that he could hit anything with it. Mrs. Moss, he knew, was a member of Fortescue's organization, but if real trouble developed—

"What are *you* looking so serious about?" Paula demanded.

"Nothing," said Richard. "I was working out what we had to do to the barn now that we've got the house in order."

Visitors to the farm were few but regular; and already their visits had fallen into a pattern. The grocer from East Harling delivered on Tuesdays and Fridays. The fishmonger and butcher came out from Diss on Thursdays. Twice every day the little red mail truck came bowling down the lane with letters and newspapers. And on Fridays the dustcart arrived to carry away the week's rubbish.

Mrs. Moss, doubtless acting on orders, allowed none of them near the house but went out to the gate herself to collect their offerings. To Richard they were blurred faces, seen behind a windshield, except for the rubbish collectors, whose names were Ernest and Leonard, and with whom he had exchanged local gossip.

The postman was a thickset, cheerful man. He operated from Diss, and had taken over the round which included Harwood Farm on the day before Richard and Paula arrived. He lodged in a back street, and although apparently a temporary, he carried out his work in an efficient and conscientious manner.

Indeed, so conscientious was he that in the evenings, after his rounds were completed, he would often take his truck and tour the district, memorizing roads and lanes, and houses and farms, and the position of telephone booths and A.A boxes.

That Thursday night, when he returned to his lodgings, he found a postcard propped up on the mantelpiece. The front showed a stout lady in a bathing suit, whose toe was being nibbled at by a crab. On the back was written, *Uncle Tom and the three boys planning to start for the country tomorrow*. It was signed *Edna* and the name was underlined three times.

"Three line whip," said the postman to himself. He went across to

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the cupboard and took out a violin case. But what he took out of the case, and spent half an hour overhauling, was certainly not a violin.

Friday was a perfect day. The sun rose through a cloak of early morning mist, scattered it, and sailed in majesty across the heavens. Life at Harwood Farm pursued its unexciting course. The grocer came with groceries, and the postman, on his morning round, stopped for a gossip with Mrs. Moss. He seemed to do most of the talking. Mrs. Moss contented herself with nodding. She was a woman of few words. Her only relaxation was the *Times* crossword puzzle which she regularly finished in the kitchen when they had given it up in the drawing room.

In the afternoon Paula rigged her steam hose, a fearsome contraption of plastic pipe and chromium fittings, and cleaned out the cowstalls at the end of the barn. The thin, scalding jet stripped the filth of ages from the floors and wooden walls with the speed and clean efficiency of a rotary plane.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when the dustcart drove up. The driver reversed the lumbering vehicle in the area in front of the gate. He did it clumsily, clashing his gears, as if he were unused to driving this particular cart.

Three men got out of the back. They walked quickly through the yard, ignoring the two dustbins, and pushed into the kitchen.

Mrs. Moss jumped up, saw the gun in the hand of the leading man, and said calmly, "What do you want?"

"Take it easy," said the man, "and you won't get hurt."

As he said this the second man walked round behind Mrs. Moss and hit her across the back of the neck with a leather-covered cosh. The third man caught her as she fell forward.

"Put her in that closet," said the leader. "There's a bolt on the outside."

Mr. Calder, turning the mail truck in at the top of the lane, saw signs of the ambush. The surface of the road was broken where the heavy dustcart had lurched to a halt; and the hedge was broken too.

Mr. Calder jumped out to investigate and found Ernest and Leonard in the ditch, their elbows and ankles strapped, and their heads in large paper bags. He undid them, and they sat up, swearing. Mr. Calder cut them short.

"There's a public telephone three hundred yards down the main road," he said. "Get there as quick as you can—ask for this number—and when you get through, just say the word 'Action'."

Leonard, who was the younger and more spirited of the two, said, "Couldn't we go after them first?"

"No," said Mr. Calder. "You'd be in the way. Just do what I told you. And quick."

As they ran down the road, Mr.

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Calder got back into his truck. They would hear him coming, but that could no longer be helped. Speed was now more important than surprise. Anyway, he had no intention of driving up to the house. He had long ago located a field path, usable in dry weather, which led off the lane to a point behind the barn.

The farmhouse being old, and its walls thick, Richard, who was writing in the drawing room, had heard nothing of the goings-on in the kitchen. He did, however, hear heavy footsteps coming along the stone-floored passage—footsteps which could not belong to Mrs. Moss or Paula.

He had just enough time to get his gun out. It wasn't a bad shot for a first attempt. He missed Cotter, who led the rush through the door, but hit the man behind him in the knee.

Cotter, steadying himself, shot Richard in the right shoulder blade, knocking him off his chair onto the floor. Then he picked up Richard's gun, expertly gun-whipped him, and took no further notice of him.

"We'll look after Lawrie in a moment," he said. "We've got to grab the girl before she runs for it."

It was unfortunate for them that being in a hurry, they both came out of the door and into the yard together. Cotter realized their mistake when he heard the girl's voice from behind them. She said, "This gun's loaded, both barrels. Even I couldn't miss you from here."

The two men turned. Cotter's gun was back in its shoulder holster. The other man had not drawn his. And the girl was aiming a twelve-bore, double-barreled sporting rifle.

"Into the barn," she ordered.

They moved slowly ahead of her. Cotter looked at the door as he went through to see if he could slam it, but it was wedged open with a stake.

"Down that end," she said. "Now. Take your guns out, slowly, and drop them on the floor."

The two men had spread themselves out. It was a deliberate movement. They knew very well that the odds were still on their side. As Cotter pulled his gun out and dropped it onto the floor in front of him, he let it fall even farther to one side, and shuffled after it. The other man did the same.

Paula's gun barrel wavered. They were now so far apart that one shot could not cover both of them.

"What are you planning to do?" said Cotter, edging over still farther. He was now almost up against the side wall of the barn. "Keep us here till it's dark?"

He had seen the side door of the barn move and guessed it was the fourth man, the driver of the dust-cart, coming to lend a hand. Keep her attention, and the driver could jump her from behind. No point in shooting her.

Paula saw the danger out of the corner of her eye. She swung round, and fired both barrels. The first missed altogether. The second hit

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the driver in the chest. As she fired, she dropped the gun, put out a hand without hurry, took hold of the steam hose, and flicked open the nozzle.

A jet of scalding steam, thin and sharp as a needle, hissed out, seemed to hang in the air for a moment, and then hit Cotter full in the face as he stooped for his gun. He went forward onto his knees. The hose followed him down, searing and stripping.

The second man got hold of his gun. Mr. Calder, standing square in the doorway of the barn, shot his legs out from under him.

When the carload of Special Branch men arrived they found Mr. Calder in the barn. The Officer in charge was the same, dark-haired young man whom Mr. Behrens had encountered at the police station. He introduced himself to Mr. Calder as Superintendent Patrick Petrella.

"We got your message," he said, "and passed it on to London. Behrens will have rounded up Smythe and the others by now. I don't think they're going to give us much trouble. Cotter was the mainspring of the whole operation."

"He's a busted mainspring now," said Mr. Calder. "There's going to be a lot of cleaning up to do. I've got three wounded men for you. And two dead."

"I've yet to learn," said Petrella, "that it's a crime to resist an armed attempt at kidnaping. She'll get a vote of thanks." He moved across to the other end of the barn where two shapes lay, covered by sacks. "Which is Cotter?"

"This one," said Mr. Calder. "He isn't a very nice sight."

"Good God!" said Petrella, shaken out of his phlegm. "What did she do that with?"

"She used a high-pressure steam hose," said Mr. Calder. "Cotter made a mistake. He killed her dog —rather messily. I know just how she felt. I've got a dog myself."

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magazine BOX SCORE for 1965

In editing his fourth volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1966 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 17 stories, of which 15 appeared in magazines (and of these 15 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 100 stories from magazines and 9 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 100 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1965:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	55	55%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	15	15%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	10	10%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	4	4%
Argosy	2	2%
Playboy	2	2%
Saturday Evening Post	2	2%
Atlantic	1	1%
Cavalier	1	1%
Cosmopolitan	1	1%
Diners' Club Magazine	1	1%
Gamma	1	1%
Horror	1	1%
Mademoiselle	1	1%
MD	1	1%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	1%
Rogue	1	1%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly twice as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 55 Honor Roll stories in 1965 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

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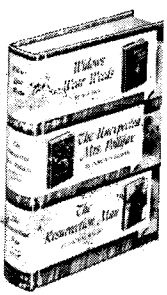

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